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YEAR OF LIFE



William Samuel Lilly

1. Fiction, English

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Lili.

A Year of Life

A Year of Life

By

William Samuel Lilly

"Innocence, the sacred amulet
'Gainst all the poisons of infirmity,
Of all misfortune, injury, and death:
That makes a man in tune still in himself."

George Chapman.



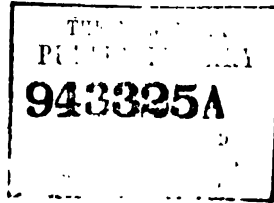
JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1900

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A YEAR OF LIFE

CHAPTER I

SIR PHILIP SAVILE was giving a little dinner to three friends, and was particularly pleased with himself and his surroundings; as, indeed, he had some reason to be. He was a man approaching forty; tall, square-shouldered, with fair hair not yet thin on the temples, a golden-brown moustache, a bronzed skin, and a presence singularly attractive both to women and men. People declared it was his eyes that did it: dark-blue eyes, with dark eyelashes, lazy-looking as a rule, but now and then flashing frankly into you and taking you by storm. His rooms exhibited tokens of varied culture and of diverse tastes. Here were savage-looking spears and other weapons, trophies of travels in strange lands; there hung a sketch by Alma Tadema. On one table was a collection of rare Elzevir editions; on another, ancient Venetian glass. The walls were covered with old Aubusson tapestry. On the elaborately carved Chippendale sideboard glistened quaint Flemish silver.

To the right of him sat his aunt, Mrs. Tremenheere, a pretty old lady, apparently well in the sixties; to the left, Lilian Liddell, a lovely

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girl who might be just out of her teens. Opposite him was a man some ten years younger than himself, strongly built, and fair too, but with a fairness that almost at once proclaimed his German nationality. Without pretension to the singular personal attractions of Philip Savile, his first cousin, Adolf von Kleist, had a striking face, on which the motto of his race, "Tender and True," seemed to be written. It was a face which made men trust him as straight and steadfast, and women confide in him as sympathetic and sincere.

"This champagne of yours is a magnificent wine, Philip," Kleist remarked. "I have been wondering what it is."

"It is a special cuvée of '74 Pommery," Savile replied. "There is a history about it. One night I was dining at Shropshire House, and thought the champagne extraordinarily fine. I ventured to say so to the Duke, who told me what it was. Next day I got a note asking me to do him the favour of accepting a few bottles of it, as he feared there was none to be had at the wine merchants'. And my man told me he had sent me three dozen. This is some of it."

"How like the Duke's princely way!" said Mrs. Tremeneere. "I'm afraid the wine is a little lost on me, though I know enough to realise that it is superb. But I fully appreciate your cuisine, Philip. I'm afraid, however, that this *recherché* little dinner will make Lilian quite discontented with our plain cook at home."

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"Dear auntie, she certainly is a plain cook — quite the plainest woman I ever saw," said the girl, laughing at her own little joke; "but really she gives us very nice dinners; don't you think so, Baron?"

"I enjoyed my evening with you and Mrs. Tremenheere last Saturday more than I can tell. All things tasted sweet to me," Kleist replied.

Lilian smiled as she looked at him, and thought how nice he was. Mrs. Tremenheere laughed with pleasure. She loved to have her things admired and appreciated. Most of her friends knew of her amiable weakness and generally contrived to find something worth praising in her home at Wimbledon, which, indeed, was not difficult. She smoothed down some rare lace that she wore in a sort of fichu over her shoulders, and said in a rather high-pitched but not loud voice, —

"Adolf's life is one of plain living and high thinking. I believe, Philip, that though he appreciates your wine, your dainty dishes were almost lost on him! Now confess, Adolf, am I not right? You are in a dream to-night. I believe that you have been meditating about a new chapter in your great work!"

Kleist blushed for the second time that evening, and stammered a little as he answered gravely: "It grieves me if I have seemed absent-minded, but indeed I was n't thinking of my book," and he glanced furtively across the table.

"There are two ways of being absent-minded,

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are n't there, Adolf?" said Savile. "Some people are absent-minded because they are thinking of something else, and some because they are thinking of nothing! Which was your case?"

"Neither," he answered thoughtfully, "neither. I do not see that one could think of anything but Mrs. Tremenhoe and Miss Liddell when one is in their charming society."

Mrs. Tremenhoe laughed once more.

"That is a pretty speech of yours, Adolf; you must be rewarded with more of our society! Now when will you come and see us at Wimbledon again?"

"How kind you are! May I come to luncheon to-morrow, I wonder?"

"Of course you may. We shall be delighted; sha'n't we, Lilian? You know we lunch at one o'clock. Will you come too, Philip?"

"I will certainly come and see you to-morrow, dear aunt. I hope you don't forget that it is my birthday; and I make a point of being with you, if I can, on that day. But I am not quite sure that I can be in time for luncheon. You won't mind my leaving it an open question, I am sure?" And he smiled at his aunt in a way which few women, old or young, could resist. Then, suddenly turning to the girl, he went on: "I will take you for a ride, Lilian, if you like. I think I could manage it to-morrow."

Lilian, who had been sitting pale and unconcerned for some time, now brightened up at once. "Oh, I should love that! Riding is quite a passion of mine, or —" pausing and

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blushing slightly — “I mean it used to be, when —”

“When what, Lilian?” asked Savile. “Before you went to Spalton Rectory, do you mean? Well, never give up a ‘passion,’” and a strange, thoughtful look came over his face, “it makes life poorer.” Then, changing his tone, “I consider it settled that we are to have a ride. I will come down on one of my horses, and will send a servant with another for you. We’ll have a good gallop in Richmond Park. You deserve a little enjoyment after all your labours, little governess!”

Mrs. Tremenheere sighed — a very audible sigh that told the hearers it meant to assert itself and be heard.

“Little governess! That is a very sore subject with me. But Lilian would have her way, the self-willed child! Dear me! there is the clock striking half-past ten. What a lovely old Louis Seize bit of work it is! I’ve never seen it before. It must have cost a lot of money, you extravagant fellow.”

“No, my dear aunt, it cost me nothing; it was a present to me. But must you go?”

“Yes,” sighed the old lady, “we must go. How quickly the evening has passed! You are the most charming of hosts, Philip; don’t you think so, Lilian?”

Lilian was playing with a piece of pineapple. She looked up, as the question was put to her, with a forced smile, and her voice took a rather sad ring as she answered: “I can’t say how much

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I have enjoyed this evening. I shall think of it often when I have gone back to Spalton. And how deliciously still it is here in the Albany. One seems to drink in the quiet. The noisy London streets have quite bewildered me after three months of our peaceful Kentish lanes."

"Yes, dear. But we really must go," Mrs. Tremenheere again said, as she rose with evident reluctance from her seat and crossed to Philip's side. "Do you know," she continued, "we have paid you a compliment in coming here to-night?" And she laid her hand on his coat-sleeve and looked up affectionately into his face. "The other day, when we were at the opera, where a friend had lent us a box, the Duke of Shropshire came in with Lady Helena. I am never quite sure," thoughtfully, "whether I like the Duke or his sister best. They asked us to dine with them to-night. We refused, as we were already engaged to you. But they made us promise to go to Shropshire House in the evening; so we must depart. Don't you think it strange that the Duke has never married? But Lady Helena makes an excellent hostess. Come, Lilian, we sha'n't get home much before one o'clock even now! We are not often so late."

"No, not often; and at Spalton Rectory we all go to bed at ten!" Lilian laughed. "There we cultivate sleep as a fine art, unlike you tired London people, who are amateurs at it."

She rose as she spoke, and, crossing the room to the fireplace, took up the photograph of a singularly handsome woman from the mantelpiece,

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and glanced at it curiously. The fine curves of her youthful figure were outlined in their delicate beauty as she stood against the firelight. A dress of pale green Liberty silk hung in graceful folds from hip to feet, and a bodice of paler green chiffon, fastened on the shoulder with a bunch of lilies of the valley, set off admirably the delicate whiteness of her transparent skin. Her neck was long, and was set on her shoulders with that wonderful line which is so rarely beautiful and is so rarely seen. Round it she wore a small row of pearls. Her hair, too, was pale, neither golden nor bronze, but yellow. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were of a soft dark brown, and her eyes the colour of deep grey clouds. There was an air of distinction about her which even poverty, that most levelling of all evils, had not been able to touch. She was *grande dame* almost in spite of herself, and quite in spite of her surroundings, wherever she happened to be.

Savile, keenly alive to beauty in every form, noticed the grace of her attitude as she stood by the fire, and a gleam of interest that had not been there before crossed his eyes. He, too, rose and came beside her. She stood, unconscious of his scrutiny, earnestly gazing at the photograph, and seemed about to ask a question; but she checked herself as Savile said: "I think I must try and look in at Shropshire House to-night, too. How late, I wonder, am I likely to find you there? I am not sure, though, that I can, for I am expecting Williamson here about a very important matter. Suppose you guess what it is, Lilian?"

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"Let me see — a very important matter? It must be a horse!" Then, seeing confirmation of her surmise in Savile's smile, she laughed. "Ah! you see, I know your tastes!"

She paused suddenly, for the door opened and a servant announced that the Baron's carriage was waiting.

Kleist was talking to Mrs. Tremenheere about the curious and subtle differences between English and German women of the upper classes, in a manner which greatly interested the cultivated old lady. On hearing that his carriage was there, he at once offered it to her. "Please keep it," he said, "and let it take you back to Wimbledon. No, I really sha'n't want it. I am going only a very little way, and shall prefer to walk."

After the usual demur that follows an offer of this kind, Mrs. Tremenheere accepted it, remarking: "You have an unusual thoughtfulness for women, Adolf, which is the truest courtesy; you are a *preux chevalier*."

"Yes," said Savile, looking good-naturedly at his cousin, "he is a burning and a shining light in an age of the decline and fall of good manners. Well, he shall do the honours of his carriage to you and Lilian, and I will spare his blushes by not accompanying him and listening to the charming things you will say. If I don't see you later, dear aunt, good-night." And he brushed his moustache against Mrs. Tremenheere's cheek. "Good-night, Lilian!" lightly patting the girl's arm.

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CHAPTER II

WHEN they had gone, Savile sank into an easy-chair and, lighting a cigarette, — he had refrained till then, knowing that his aunt disliked tobacco-smoke in a room, — mused upon the events of the evening. He congratulated himself upon the success of his dinner. Everything had been well cooked. The champagne was singularly fine, and was of the right temperature. He was very fond of his aunt — his father's only sister — and genuinely attached to cousin Adolf von Kleist, while Lilian had added the touch of beauty which crowned the entertainment; so that several of his tastes had been gratified. Then he fell to wondering about Lilian. She had seemed different from her usual self. Her gaiety had appeared to his quick observation rather forced. Adolf, too, had been unusually quiet. But then Adolf had a way of being quiet at times. His mind would fly away from outside surroundings and lose itself in a new thought for his book. His book! Curious that a man of his fortune should be devoted to that sort of thing! And yet, was it curious? Was that not a more rational object of devotion than Philip Savile's?

He was thus meditating when Kleist returned.

"I was just thinking of you, Adolf. Come and have a cigarette and tell me what's up. You look a bit queer; you are melancholy."

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"Do I look a bit queer?" answered Kleist, as he let the smoke curl slowly out of his mouth, and his face wore the air of a man who is bracing himself up to an effort. "Do I, Philip? Well, I *am* melancholy to-night." And he sank back in the chair and crossed his legs.

"Melancholy?—Are you? What's the matter with you? Why, there is sentiment shining moistly out of your eyes! Upon my word, I believe you are in love! Is that it—eh?" And Savile smiled in the manner of a master touching on a subject which was specially his own.

Kleist paused a moment before answering, and then he said gravely, "I am awfully in love."

Savile gave a low whistle. "Your tone is really quite tragic! Now, what is it? Why should you be melancholy? Is your passion unrequited?"

"I don't know—I have not declared it." And he fixed his eyes on the fire as if seeking to see visions of happiness in the flame.

"Well, if I were you, I *should* declare it. When I'm in love—and I am pretty often—I make a point of declaring my passion as soon as possible. Many a fortress is taken by storm that would resist a siege."

Kleist turned and faced his cousin. They were as dissimilar as they could be in appearance and in temperament, though their mothers had been sisters and singularly alike. Yet there existed a real and hearty affection between the two men, and as Kleist looked at Savile, it

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was with an expression of lenient, half pitying amusement.

"You are a sad scapegrace, Philip," he said; "but you see matters are different with me. I am serious, and, what is more to the point, before I pay my addresses to the lady, I must ask your leave."

"My leave? I am not your keeper!"

"No," and Kleist's face grew very grave, "you are not my keeper, but you are *her* guardian."

"What! I say, Adolf, you don't mean —" And Savile paused and gazed wonderingly into Kleist's face, "You don't mean —"

"Yes, I do; I mean that I am in love, utterly in love, with Lilian — with Miss Liddell; and as you are her guardian —"

Philip rose and put his hand on Kleist's shoulder. "My dear fellow, you are really in love with Lilian?"

"She is an angel — far, far too good for me. But how I love her!"

Savile took a turn up and down the room, and then came and stood over Kleist. "She is a dear little girl, of course," he said, "and you would be a splendid match for her — quite a wonderful match, you know. You are a right down good fellow to start with; you're no end of a swell in your own country, and you're confoundedly rich too — with lands and mines and all sorts of things. She, poor little woman, has n't one penny. I suppose you know that?"

Kleist's blue eyes flashed. "What is money

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or mines, or anything in comparison with that angel!"

"Angels I don't know much about, though I do know a good many women of sorts. Anyhow, money and mines are deuced good things, and I only wish I had half as much of either of them as you have! So you care for Lilian, do you? I *am* glad, I really am! I should be more than happy to see her married to you. Win her by all means. You have my full permission—which is, after all, mere nonsense, for I am not really her guardian. I suppose you know her story, don't you?"

Kleist looked round with bright, keen interest as he answered, —

"Not quite. Wait till I get another of your cigarettes. Where do you keep this special brand? Oh, in that box! Now go on." He reseated himself amid the cushions of a large arm-chair and prepared to listen.

Savile laughed. "The history is not so very long," he began, "that you need have made such preparations for your comfort while I tell it. Her father coached me for Eton and Oxford, and did his best to make a scholar of me. I owe him all I know. It was quite impossible not to learn with such a dear old boy to teach you. I owe him my life too. One day when we were out swimming, about a mile from land, I was seized with cramp, and he saved me, very nearly getting drowned himself. He married late in life a very lovely and quite penniless woman, on getting one of my livings, and died

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within six years. His wife died five months after, and Lilian was left quite unprovided for. Her only discoverable relation was a judge in Canada with a large family and a small salary, who evidently didn't want to be bothered with the kid. So I got my aunt, Mrs. Tremenheere, to look after her till we could see what could be done. Mrs. Tremenheere soon became immensely fond of the little thing, who grew up to call her auntie ; and they have been together ever since. A few months ago, for no rhyme or reason, the girl declared that she must and would be independent. Mrs. Tremenheere did her utmost to resist, and so did I, but in vain ; she insisted on becoming a governess."

"Poor little thing!" murmured Kleist, fondly, beneath his breath.

"It was all her own doing. My aunt's half sister, Lady Betty, who married Phillips, the Rector of Spalton, happened to want a governess at the moment. Lilian is extremely well educated and fulfilled all requirements. The whole thing fitted in, and she has been at the Rectory for the last three months, teaching the little Phillips girl, and of course they are delighted to have her there, as well they may be. It is holiday time now, so she has come back to my aunt for a few weeks. That is, briefly, Lilian's history up to date. She is very much admired, but, so far as I know, she has never had an offer. Your way is clear before you. Go in and win, dear boy, and take my blessing with you!"

Kleist passed his hand over his moustache.

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"That sounds very easy, but I am rather diffident. You see, she is so beautiful, such an angel! and — and — I shall lose my head when I begin — I shall talk bad English, and — [getting up and giving himself a sort of shake] and I shall make a fool of myself!"

"I say, Adolf, you *are* hard hit!" and Savile glanced at him with genuine wonder in his eyes. "You *are* hard hit. But, angel or not, you will have to ask her if you mean to marry her, I suppose?"

"You will think me a fool, Philip, but you don't know how I shrink from asking her." And his look became very pathetic in its earnestness. "I was wondering if *you* would say something for me. You might at least broach the subject to her." His voice took a very anxious tone.

"Why, of course I will!" Savile answered heartily; "anything to please you, though it is not a plan which I should myself adopt. However, I suppose it is your German way. I shall see Lilian to-morrow afternoon, — I am going to Wimbledon, you know, — and I will lose no time in fulfilling your embassy. There is the bell! It must be Williamson, whom I am expecting. Do you want to say anything more before he comes in?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Philip. You are most good to say you will help me! and I sha'n't go down to Wimbledon to-morrow. I shall keep away till I hear from you."

Then the door opened, and the servant announced Dr. Williamson, and as the new-comer

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entered, Philip came forward with outstretched hand to greet him.

Dr. Williamson was thick-set and of the middle height, with reddish hair, a little grizzled in places, and with an indication of a whisker on either cheek, but otherwise clean shaven. His quick dark eyes looked keenly from under heavy eyebrows; his even teeth — so even that he was often accused of having false ones — gave a peculiar character of firmness to his expression. And his grave, self-possessed manner seldom failed to instil trust into those that came in contact with him.

As Savile met him, anyone would have seen at once that the new arrival was a favourite with the owner of the chambers. "My dear Williamson, you are always welcome," he said, as he pushed a chair forward for his guest.

Dr. Williamson shook hands with Kleist, who was evidently well known to him, and took the proffered chair, as he said: "To-night I think that I shall be doubly welcome, for I come to tell you that you can get that mare Sunlight if you like. Majoribanks has offered her to me for a hundred guineas, at which, of course, she is dirt cheap. But I don't want her; I can hardly keep one saddle horse in exercise. Will you have her?"

"I should rather think I will! She is a little beauty. I am not sure that I have a hundred guineas just now. But I'll have the mare anyhow!"

"My dear Philip, why not make me your banker?" the Baron put in quickly.

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"Thank you, dear boy, but no. I am too fond of you to borrow money from you. I say, Williamson, cast your professional eye on Kleist, and tell me if you don't think he looks a bit queer."

Dr. Williamson took a long, steady look at the young man, and answered lightly: "A little worn, perhaps. Is it from hard work, or hard living, Baron?"

"My dear Williamson," and Savile's voice took a mock-grave tone, "my cousin, you must know, scorns delights and lives laborious days, and I daresay he is a bit exhausted by his intellectual toil. He is a savant of the first water, and he is writing a great book which is to harmonise nineteenth century and sixteenth century thought. He is the man Clough longed for: 'Utter, O someone, the word that shall reconcile ancient and modern!' 'Luther in Evolution,' I believe, is the title of your work, is n't it, Adolf?"

"No, that's not quite the name!" Kleist laughed. "But it is too soon to talk about the book at present, for I have only just got to the end of the second volume, which completes the introduction. It will prolong itself."

"A book on such a subject could not well be short," Williamson observed. "It is a task well worth devoting one's life to, or two or three lives, if only one had them," he added drily.

"I look on you, Adolf, as a sort of Dentist in Divinity, your specialty being the painless extraction of worn-out theological teeth," Savile remarked.

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The Baron laughed and rose, taking up his hat from a side table.

"What, going already? Are you in a hurry? Sit down again and have another cigarette."

"I am afraid I must go. I promised to look in at the German Embassy to-night, and I don't like late hours. So good-night, Philip, and thanks very much for a most pleasant evening. Good-night, Dr. Williamson!" And he ran lightly down the stairs.

He decided not to take a cab, for his thoughts were full of Lilian, and he wanted solitude,—the strange solitude that is to be found in the London streets by those who are accustomed to them. The intense excitement of first love had mounted into his brain, and he knew that he was experiencing the great passion of his life. He had seen Lilian several times, in past years, as a child. Three weeks ago he saw her as a woman. He was calling upon Mrs. Tremenheere when the door opened and she appeared. Every detail of that lovely vision was fresh in his memory: the well-fitting dress of dark blue cotton; the bunch of lilies at her throat,—she always wore lilies; it was a sentiment of hers, the outcome of her name; the large conservatory opening from the door through which she came, and providing for background to her beauty a mass of coloured flowers as she stood there, her delicate face crowned by its wondrous hair. The picture was photographed on his brain for ever. Then her manner had been so simple and so dignified, and she had spoken in such a can-

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did, fresh tone, that the charm of her appearance was riveted the closer. When he took his leave, he had made an excuse for coming down to Wimbledon on the morrow to bring Mrs. Tremenheere some wonderful German bulbs he had promised her for her garden, — the dear old lady's great hobby. Ever since, he had managed to see Lilian well nigh daily, on one pretext or another. Every time he saw her, he fell more and more under her charm, till his very soul was bound up in the winning of her. Now, after his talk with his cousin, as he walked through the ugly and infamously lighted London streets, everything was transfigured for him by the radiance of hope. The dim gas-lamps burned with a glad brightness. The dingy houses assumed a winning picturesqueness. In the careworn, sordid, vulgar faces of the hurrying crowds, he seemed to find some reflection of his own "soft and delicate desires." He was unwontedly brilliant at the German Embassy. His friends marvelled at him. Their half bantering compliments at his gaiety led him to fear that he was wearing his heart on his sleeve. And he went home soon, to carry his day-dreams into the happy night.

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CHAPTER III

WHEN Kleist had left, Savile and Williamson sat for some time without speaking, as men will who know each other, and like each other, well. At last Williamson broke the silence with, as might have been expected, a trivial remark. "Deuced good cigarettes these, Savile. Where do you get them?"

"Straight from Egypt; it's the only way to have anything worth smoking. I say, Williamson, do you know that I often envy you? I have been thinking of you as you sat opposite to me."

Dr. Williamson looked up from under his eyebrows, and a smile played for a moment over his thin lips. "You envy *me*? That is rather a surprising announcement! I can't for the life of me think why. You have considerable position as a baronet of ancient lineage, and great connections; most men envy *you*; all women flatter you; the world in general spoils you; while I am a hard-working doctor, with a very delicate wife who has to spend her life abroad, away from me. Why do you envy me?"

"For lots of reasons, old man. In the first place, I have never seen you bored. I live in a perpetual state of boredom. Everything bores me, — society, amusements, even sport. Then you are always doing such a confounded lot of good. Don't laugh to hear me say that! I, on

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the contrary, am generally doing harm, if I am doing anything at all. And you are making a large income; you own to £10,000 last year! I came into a certain amount when I was of age, of course, as everyone knows; but that has been diminishing steadily. My dear Williamson, I am sick of the life I lead!" And Savile poked up the dying fire with more energy than he had shown that evening.

The other man looked at him consideringly, and then answered, with a certain slow deliberation that was one of his characteristics: "You don't altogether surprise me by what you say, Savile. I have always felt that a man of fashion must be a great deal harder worked than a fashionable physician. And, when one comes to weigh things, and to think of them in their just proportion, it is difficult to find out what you, for instance, get for your pains. I at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I am a commercial success. People given over to society spend their lives 'blindly striving, achieving nothing.'"

"Achieving nothing! Yes, that's about true, I think," Savile muttered half to himself. "'Blindly striving — achieving nothing!' That is precisely the case with me. Ever since I left Oxford I have done absolutely nothing, and that is nearly twenty years ago now. A long time spent in doing nothing, eh?" And a somewhat wistful look came over his face.

"It's an odd thing that you should have spoken like this, Savile, for I had it in my mind when I came here to read you a bit of a lecture,

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if I found the opportunity. Do you feel like it?"

"Fire away, old man! Only don't make it too long. I like my lectures in homœopathic doses!"

"All right; I won't be long about it. I hope I'm too experienced a doctor not to understand the strength of my patients' nerves. Here goes then. It seems to me that you ought by now to have done much more than I have. You might, if you had liked. You did better than I in the schools at Oxford, and you might have carried off everything if you had chosen. You are a far abler man than I am."

"Draw it mild!" put in Philip, laughing.

"It is true; a far abler man, I repeat, as well as infinitely more brilliant. But, with the exception of those two years when you notably made your mark in the House of Commons, you have done nothing, or, as you said just now, — and upon my word, I can't contradict you! — worse than nothing! Why you could n't even take the trouble to nurse your constituency a bit, and keep your seat in Parliament! If you had stuck to it, you would almost certainly be in the Government by now, and very likely in the Cabinet."

Savile rose, stood with his back to the fire, and yawned slightly, as he said: "My dear Williamson, Parliament is an awful bore! To my mind, a successful politician has a dog's life of it. And as for nursing a constituency, it is about as much in my line as nursing a baby."

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“There is no doubt something in the way you look at life. But then, the fact is, that you look at it too closely, and so you miss the right proportion of things,” the doctor continued. “I am never bored, simply because my thoughts are always occupied with an object beyond myself—my work. I am devoted to my profession. But do you suppose that a doctor’s existence,—that my existence,—if it is scrutinised too closely, is a particularly exhilarating one? Of course, now and then—” and he drawled his words as if in deeper thought—“now and then we get cases of absorbing interest. But the great majority of our patients are men and women of the world—of *your* world—who have overeaten themselves; and then there is a considerable proportion who have nothing whatever the matter with them. This very morning a great lady—of course I don’t divulge her name—came to me and gave me a very detailed account of her woes. I listened with a grave face, though I very speedily became convinced that she was really in the most excellent health, and, finally, I made up my mind to tell her so, simply and straightly. She did not much like it, but, to my great surprise, she took what I had said in very good part; and then, to show the extraordinary inconsistency of women, she rather tried to back out of giving me my fee. I explained to her that the time she had taken out of my day was worth a great deal more than two guineas to me, and that if she would only believe what I had just told her, her visit to me would save her a great many guineas. But I know she

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won't. The old girl will be off to-morrow, or the day after, to some other doctor with the same stupid story. The only cure for an imaginary invalid is a sharp touch of real illness."

"You remind me of a story I heard the other day of some swell French doctor—I forget his name. A patient had been telling him a long rigmarole, and the physician's mind had, not unnaturally, wandered as the familiar tale proceeded. At last the patient pulled up short and asked anxiously, 'Well, doctor, what is it?' 'Forty francs,' was the answer."

"Good," Williamson said with a smile. "But *you* are not an imaginary invalid, Savile. Your malady is real enough, although it is not physical but moral. Now hear my prescription." And he fixed his keen, searching eyes on his friend. "The one thing that you want is a worthy object and aim in life. Break away from this idle, useless existence, and cut the ties that bind you,—one tie in particular, which I won't mention. Find something worth doing, and do it with all your might. That is my prescription for you."

A silence fell on both. The one was full of what he had been saying, and wondering how the man he cared for would take it. The other was deeply considering what had been said, and trying to weigh it in the uneven scales of his mind. A coal fell out of the fire and unloosed Savile's tongue by recalling him to the sense of where he was. "You think very badly of society, Williamson," he said.

Dr. Williamson looked up suddenly, as if

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waking from a sound sleep, so profound had been his thoughts.

"I don't go into it more than I can help. I know too much of it. It seems to me a mixture of hypocrisy and vice. It creates an atmosphere that chokes our intellect and flattens out our talent. If it is in a good humour with us, it panders to our vanity, and if it is in a bad, it takes away our character."

He paused. He had a habit of pausing when he had made a speech of any length, rather as if to think over his words, than to invite his companion to answer them. Savile, however, took advantage of his silence to say mockingly, "You are waxing quite eloquent, Williamson."

"The plain, unvarnished truth is always eloquent, though often disagreeable. Well, you have had my prescription. Carry it out. Break away, I say, from this idle and useless existence. Marry some good girl, if you can find one, — I, personally, should not look for her in a London drawing-room, — a girl who can inspire you with a sincere affection, and give you a pure love in return. Go into Parliament again, or occupy yourself with the duties of a country gentleman, with literature, with art, with anything you like, so long as it takes you out of yourself, and gives you an object beyond the amusement of the hour to live for. Any serious employment, from scavengering upwards, is better than the sham sentimentality, the real animalism, the cynical scepticism, the morbid introspection, which fill the existence of a man about town. In this way

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you would get an ideal back into your life, and without an ideal, life is not worth living. Our intellect, our imagination, our will, demand it. Without it the intellect is debased, the imagination prostituted, the will enslaved to the service of animal passions, — *passiones ignominiae*, with whatever fine names you deck them out."

Williamson spoke with the earnestness of deep conviction, and with the authoritativeness which his profession had made habitual. Savile looked at him gravely, pondering his words in a mind as keen as the speaker's, but somewhat warped and spoilt by the enervating effects of a life of pleasure.

"I take it then," he said, "that your advice comes to this — *se ranger*. Well, it is in itself sound advice — that I don't doubt. But have you sufficiently considered your patient's constitution, doctor? Everyone can't be treated with the same drugs. And I am not at all sure that I am by any means fitted to go in for a Darby and Joan existence, though I am pretty sick of the one I am leading. And where would you have me look for the 'good girl' and the 'pure affection,' even if I had a taste for the idyllic, of which I am not conscious? I have seen too much of women, Williamson."

"Too much of women of one kind, and too little, or almost nothing, of women of another. Your experience of the sex has been varied, no doubt; but, for the sake of my argument, just try and recollect, can you call to mind any one single *good* woman that you have ever loved, or

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what you call loved, — any woman who seemed to you the embodiment of purity, truth, and nobleness ? ”

Savile laughed outright.

“ I say, my dear old man, do draw it mild ! ‘ Purity, truth, and nobleness ! ’ Well, they are not the qualities associated with my tenderest recollections ! ”

Williamson looked at him, shrugged his shoulders and sighed impatiently. Savile’s supine indifference, lazy good-nature, and well-bred indolence, irritated him ; and his voice grew harder and less sympathetic as he continued : “ No ; your society woman is chiefly made up of nerves and vanity ; and that is the only type of woman you really know, Savile. You have had many so-called love affairs ; but love you have never known, of that I feel convinced, — love, I mean, in the true and deep sense of the word ; the sense that it should bear among men and women as beings of a higher order than moths and mollusca, as possessing a world of the ideal — ”

“ There you are again, Williamson ! The ‘ ideal ’ ! My dear old fellow, you are out of date with your ideal — we live in an age of realism ! ”

“ My daily experience shows me that we live in an age when the old chivalrous feeling about woman, that so much helped to idealise life, is menaced by a vulgar animalism. Don’t sneer at a Darby and Joan existence, old friend ! It is the highest, as you will perhaps one day

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recognise. The great function of woman in our age is to be the priestess of the ideal. It is marriage as it has come down to us, with its unity and its permanence, which guards that function and is the bulwark of our civilisation."

Savile laughed.

"Really, Williamson, you would make an excellent preacher! I read somewhere the other day that the doctors will be the clergy of the future! I shall see you in possession of the pulpit in Westminster Abbey by and by. But it is quite delightful to find you, of all people, the full-blown free-thinker of our Oxford days, arguing as strongly as any fine old crusted Conservative in the defence of 'marriage as it has come down to us with its unity and permanence'! I remember a stirring peroration of one of your speeches at the Union, in which you declared that the trump of doom had sounded, and that those old-world institutions which cramp free human happiness — ecclesiastical matrimony among them — must obey its compelling summons, and give account of themselves to Man. Now you are running with the hare; then you hunted with the hounds."

"Yes," said Williamson, quite simply, "I began life with an unbounded admiration for what I called freedom, — free thought, free love, free everything. And I considered that a man's freedom consisted in his doing what he liked."

"You thought a man free who could do what he liked! Well, don't you think so now?"

"No, I don't. I consider that, a most inade-

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quate conception of freedom, — a merely negative conception. It is the freedom of the wild beast, not of the civilised man. Law is the essential condition of freedom, in the positive sense of the word. To ascertain and obey the law, is the one way to liberty. My own profession teaches me that. The man who understands and complies with the laws of his physical organism, is the free man; he keeps in health. The man who insists upon doing what he likes, in spite of those laws, is the slave of disease."

"A very good argument in hygiene. But in social matters?"

"It is just the same. Human society is as much governed by necessary laws as is the human body. Here, too, a man's way to freedom is to fulfil what those laws prescribe: in other words, to find out his duty and to do it. Duty is merely the expression of law in social relations."

"I don't remember that you talked much about duty at Oxford."

"No; my mind ran only upon rights then, — the rights of the individual. I did not then see that those rights cannot exist apart from duties, any more than the angles of a triangle can exist apart from the sides."

"We are becoming philosophical."

"Every question is a question of philosophy, if you follow it far enough. While lecturing the other day, I had occasion to touch on the perfect analogy between the oxidation of food in the body and of coal in the furnace; and, following out the reflections suggested to me, I went on

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thinking aloud, until, in a few minutes, I found myself landed in full metaphysics."

There was a pause, and Williamson took out his watch. Savile rose in silence, and, crossing the room, turned up another electric light that had been forgotten. Then, with a laugh, he said pleasantly, —

"Well, many thanks. You have given me a rattling good lay sermon. Almost thou persuaded me!"

"You are not annoyed, Savile? We are very old friends. Had we not been, I should not have spoken." And the doctor's voice had an unusual tone of anxiety. He feared he might have wounded the man he loved and wished to serve.

"Not a bit! I know a friend when I meet him!" And he pressed the other's hand warmly.

"Then let me say one more word before I go — I am not likely to refer to the subject again — by way of pointing my moral. Chains which we at first think silken, have a way, unknown to chemistry, of turning to iron. It is well to break them before they fetter us completely."

Philip moved uneasily, conscious of a wish that the doctor were less clear-sighted. "All right," he said. "But it's a man's own choice that the chains should be thrown over him, you know."

"Yes, at the outset; but he expects them to rest lightly on his neck, so that he can cast them off at will; not that they should grow tighter

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and heavier, till he is hopelessly shackled by them, fast bound in misery and iron."

"That sounds rather like the bond of marriage that you were advocating so strongly just now," Savile answered with a laugh.

"No; for in marriage the chains are borne by two. Remember your Horace; you might go to a worse teacher.

"*'Felices ter et amplius
Quos irrupta tenet copula, nec malis
Divulsus querimoniis,
Supremo citius solvet amor die.'*"¹

"Now I must be off. I have promised to look in on poor Lord Fileigh the last thing. He has a pretty sharp touch of typhoid. I think, however, we shall pull him through. Good-night. You can send me a line about that mare of Marjoribanks' to-morrow, when you have made up your mind."

"No, let's settle that now. I'll have her; she's too good to lose, and is just up to my weight. Have her sent round in the morning, old man. Good-night. Thanks again — hearty thanks — for your lecture. I sha'n't forget it."

¹ Horace is the abiding despair of translators, and their abiding temptation. I essay the impossible, an English rendering of these exquisite lines : —

"Thrice happy — happy more than thrice — are they
Whom bonds indissoluble join; whom love
That bickering jars can neither mar nor move,
Makes one of twain — until the closing day."

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CHAPTER IV

WHEN the door closed on Williamson, Savile turned and looked at the clock. It was not quite half-past eleven, and twelve would be quite early enough for him to appear in Shropshire House, which was only five minutes' drive from his chambers. He sat down at his writing-table, intending to finish a letter; but somehow the task seemed irksome. He rose, and, lighting another cigarette, threw himself into an easy-chair and thought over the conversation which had just taken place. What a good fellow Williamson was! How he valued their old friendship, unbroken and undimmed since their Oxford days! A good fellow, indeed! And how singularly successful, almost in spite of himself, in the profession which he had chosen! For the man cared little for money, had not a particle of ambition, and would not, in the least, set his sails to catch the breeze of popularity. He had declined to continue his attendance on more than one illustrious patient who would not follow strictly his injunctions; and he had by no means ingratiated himself with the rulers of the medical synagogues by his refusal to pronounce certain shibboleths just now popular. For example, he had on several occasions publicly expressed doubts as to the pathological value of the results obtained from vivisection, and had advocated its restriction within narrow limits. He had even

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permitted himself, in a moment of irritation, to gibe at one of the pundits of the College of Physicians, as a gentleman who, when brought to the verge of starvation by failure in the healing art, had taken to the mutilation of animals, and had at last earned a dishonourable subsistence by useless cruelty in physiological laboratories. Still, greatness had been thrust upon him, and for some years he had been famous as one of the leading medical practitioners of London. Savile wondered whether he had been equally successful in his domestic life. He was a reticent man and seldom talked about his private affairs. Savile hardly knew Mrs. Williamson. He had seen her some half dozen times, chiefly at dinners ; but he gathered that this delicate little thing without much character — “an anæmic doll,” candid friends called her — had somehow contrived to win and to retain the devoted affection of her strong, clever husband.

He glanced at the grate, thinking that he would ring for his man to replenish the fire, which was burning low, — it was a chilly summer evening, — when the vision of Lilian as she had appeared standing by it, her graceful figure outlined against the light, came before his eyes ; and then his promise to Kleist was suddenly recalled to him. Had he not been rather an idiot to make such a promise ? It was a deucedly awkward thing to put before a girl a proposal from another man. However, Adolf was such an excellent fellow that she would probably take his overtures in good part ; and he would only have to repeat

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to his cousin the advice "go in and win." It would be a splendid match for Lilian. Kleist was very rich, very well-born, of great ability, nay, a genius in his own way, besides being a thoroughly straight and manly fellow,—in every respect, indeed, admirably fitted to make a clever girl like Lilian happy.

Then his thoughts went back from Lilian to her father, and to the far-off time when he had hurried back from Scotland to soothe the old man's last moments by promising to do what he could for the wife and child,—the wife who died in six months' time, and the child who had grown into this very beautiful girl. How strangely things had turned out! He remembered Mrs. Tremenheere's evident dismay when she first consented to receive Lilian at his request. He remembered, too, how when he came down to see his aunt, a few months afterwards, and proposed that the little girl should be placed in a convent that he had heard of, to be educated for a governess, he was astonished to be met with a decided refusal. "I don't deny that I was horrified at first at the idea of having a child forced upon me,—you know I have never had one of my own,—who would frighten me to death by developing measles and whooping-cough every few weeks; but somehow I have got so fond of Lilian that nothing would induce me to part with her. She is a perfect little angel, so much more interesting than a dog; and she will become a most lovely girl—of that I am certain. And I shall be so proud of her, and take her everywhere with

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me; I am convinced she will be a most charming companion."

And how odd it was that she should suddenly have resolved to go out as a governess. No arguments had been of avail against her inflexible sweetness. Even when he had grown angry, and had declared that she was acting from false pride, and was showing a want of affection to his aunt, who loved her dearly, that it was unworthy of her to think of the few miserable pounds that had been spent on her, she had only cried, she had not yielded. Her will had been as adamant. But could she possibly like her life—even with people so altogether nice as the Phillipses? The thing had perplexed and annoyed him. It perplexed and annoyed him still. Well, dear old Adolf would do him a service by putting an end to it. He knew very little of young girls, but it seemed to him most improbable that Lilian would refuse such a brilliant proposal from such a man. And yet—somehow—he did n't like the thought of it.

At this point of his musing, he chanced to look at the clock. The hands were pointing to five minutes to twelve. He rose with the intention of starting at once for Shropshire House, when the door opened.

"Lady Mary Silverton," his servant announced, and a singularly handsome woman entered the room.

He greeted her conventionally, and told the man to make up the fire. "Mary," he exclaimed when the door was shut, "how very imprudent!"

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"You are not glad to see me?" she asked in a soft, musical voice, but with an angry flash in her lustrous eyes.

"You know I am always glad to see you," he answered, recovering himself; and, taking her hand in his, he kissed it.

"Ah, Philip, the kiss of Judas!" She drew her hand away impatiently, and, throwing her velvet, ermine-lined cloak from her white shoulders, let it fall in a heap on the ground.

Standing before him in her ball dress, with the bodice which unfriendly critics called too low, diamonds glistening in the fair coils of her hair, her blue eyes gleaming, and her full red mouth slightly curved with anger, she was a magnificent picture which Titian would have loved to paint. Savile forgot his annoyance in his admiration, as he gazed at her, and asked gently, "Why do you say that, Mary?"

"You understand well enough," and she moved imperiously across the room, while he gathered up her cloak and threw it on a chair.

"I would rather you told me," he said calmly.

"Do you think that it is right that *I* have to come here to find *you*? A few months ago *you* would have gone through fire and water to find *me*! Have you forgotten that you kept me waiting forty minutes yesterday — you know where! And then a telegram came instead of you!" Her voice was hurried. There was a catch in her throat as she spoke.

Philip frowned. No man likes to be taken to task, even by a beautiful woman.

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"You ask me two questions, *belle amie*. Must you come here? No, you must n't; it won't do, Mary. And do I know I kept you waiting forty minutes yesterday? Of course I know. Did n't I write and explain, and tell you how sorry I was?"

Lady Mary tapped on the floor impatiently. Once more the angry light crept into her eyes.

"Explain! Sorry!" Then suddenly she stretched out her two hands to him, and her voice grew pathetic as only the voice of a woman in love can. "Ah, Philip! you are changed—changed indeed! Yesterday was n't the first time that you have failed me. You excuse yourself, as often as not, when I make a plan; and you come late, if you come at all. So to-night I came here. I felt that I must see you. I must understand matters—I must have a real explanation—I am desperate." And she sank down in a chair, and covered her eyes with one hand, as if to shut out from her sight the well-loved features of the man before her.

Savile rose and came to her side. He drew forward a low chair and, taking up an end of ribbon that hung from her dress, played with it for a moment. Thoughts were rushing through his brain which kept him silent. He felt a cad, and, what was worse, an ungrateful cad, before her reproaches.

"Desperate? Well, you certainly are not prudent to come here, dearest—especially at midnight," he said at last; and he took her beautiful arm in his hand, and pressed his lips to it.

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"Silverton may be the most easy-going of men ; but a fair woman without discretion — what is a fair woman without discretion ? That is n't a riddle. It is something which I don't properly remember in the Book of Proverbs. Well, whatever she may have been down in Judee, she is now, pretty often, the respondent in the Divorce Court if, like you, she happens to be married. You don't particularly want to figure in that character, I suppose, Mary ?"

"No fear of that ! Silverton does n't mind," Lady Mary answered. "And I did so long for a little talk with you quietly. We have only a few minutes as it is. You don't grudge them to me, I hope ?"

"Do I ever grudge you anything ? How could I, after all you have been, and are, to me ? And now you are charming. But don't pitch into me, it gets on my nerves. May I smoke to tranquillise them ?"

"Oh, yes ! and give me a cigarette too."

As he rose to get it, she rose also, and, standing just where Lilian had stood an hour before, gazed at her face in the glass over the mantel-piece. How anxiously she scrutinised it, to see if there were any visible falling off in beauty that would in any way account for the coolness of the man she loved ! No ; the image in the glass was quite satisfactory ; she felt convinced that the last year had taken nothing from her.

"I'm dead tired to-night," she said in softer tones ; "put some more cushions for me on this divan. I feel like a rag ; I don't want to

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look like one at Shropshire House." And she threw herself back among several down pillows as if she had no intention of moving for some time to come. "Put that rug over my feet; this room is chilly. And now the cigarette. Light it for me, Philip."

He obeyed her behests in a way that showed how accustomed he was to wait upon her. But he felt the embarrassment of her presence there.

"Don't you think," he said, "that we ought not to delay long, if you really mean to be at Shropshire House to-night?"

"Oh, there is plenty of time! I am now supposed to be at the Morton Corrys, so I shall not be expected to arrive till nearly one. That will give us a good twenty minutes here in peace before I need leave. I would not go at all, only Silverton said that he would look in the last thing, and that the debate to-night would keep him till after one. So you see everything fits in splendidly; and I am not so much without discretion as you suppose."

"And the Morton Corrys! What of the ball?"

"I have been. You were not there, so I came here. Now you have my evening in full. Sit down by me," pointing to a footstool by her side, "and we will have a regular serious talk, — a sensible talk, like old friends."

"Like old friends! — yes — well — " And he looked at her curiously.

Lady Mary lay back and, for an old friend so anxious to have an explanation, was remarkably

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silent. At last she said: "I have made my complaint, Philip. But, you see, I know so much about your life—so very much! There are women—and men too—who are anxious enough to enlighten me, and I cannot help opening my eyes sometimes, however hard I try to keep them shut—I know—" and she caught her breath—"that faith unfaithful does *not* keep you falsely true!" And she looked at him quickly.

He was shutting and opening his cigarette case, and closely examining the snap, and his eyes were lowered. She waited a moment, and then, as he did not speak, she went on quickly,—

"But I accept the inevitable like a woman of the world. I suppose I ought to have known better than to reproach a man."

She paused, and her face was temptingly close to his; but, for the first time, he failed to take advantage of the proximity. He was too intent on what he wanted to say.

"Ah, Mary, I am no Sir Launcelot, and—and I feel I owe you the truth. The fact is, that I am sick and tired of my present life, of my useless, aimless existence, of the hideous emptiness which seems at the heart of all things."

"I understand—I know these fits of depression that you suffer from, Philip. But you have told me that I was your Egeria and could help you. And yet—you have shunned me of late," and her voice trembled.

"Dearest, you have been more to me than any other woman—much more; but—" and his

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voice was dreamy; full of his own feelings, he was forgetful of hers.

"But what?" and she sighed deeply, while a sudden grey look overspread her face. She felt that she was playing with edged tools, and that much of her happiness lay in the issue of the next few moments. "But what — tell me, Philip."

"But the malady is still there."

"Only for me to cure, perhaps. It may be that I can do more for you than I have done yet. I well understand your feeling that you are too good for the sauntering life of a man about town. You need a serious occupation, — a career. Besides — a Darby and Joan existence would be a new experience for you."

"What, Mary!" And he fairly stared at her. "I marry? It is curious advice from you!"

"Not very curious, dear," and her voice was tender and soft. "Not very curious, for I love you well enough to think of you before I think of myself. I want you to take your proper place among the men of your day; and I think a good marriage would help you to do that. Yes; it is time for you to marry!" And she touched his hair lightly with her hand.

He seized it, kissed it, and held it.

"You are very different from most women, Mary; indeed, I think from all. How good you are to me!"

"It is only that I am *more* woman than most."

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Then she stopped, abruptly, breaking out soon in a totally different voice — hard, almost metallic.

"Now, who is there that you could marry? You must have youth, beauty, and, if possible, position. She must be well bred, at least, if not well born; and you want — oh, how badly you want — money!"

"Yes, you're right there," he said bitterly. "I am abominably hard up. I don't know where to turn for money."

"Let me think —" knitting her brows and apparently deep in thought, then, suddenly clapping her hands, "How stupid I am! I need not think at all! Why, my husband's niece, Kitty Karsdale is just what you want! She is already a great heiress, you know, and she will be trebly an heiress when my husband's two old aunts die. She is a nice little girl, and has quite taken her place in society. My cousin, the Duke, who is so very fastidious about women, — that," and Lady Mary's voice took a significant and hard tone, "is why he is an old bachelor, I think — is devoted to her."

"The Duke is not particularly old, *belle amie*; he is particularly well preserved. He rides harder, shoots straighter, and walks farther, than any man I know. Last year in Scotland, he tired out every other fellow, including the gillies. He is only ten years my senior. As for me, I feel a hundred!"

"Oh, don't sing Henry's praises!" Lady Mary put in impatiently. "I know how you admire

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him without that. Let us get back to Kitty. Will she do? Will you marry her?"

"Dearest, you take my breath away! You are too sudden. Of course, if she'd have me, her fortune would be a great temptation. She's a pretty little thing, too, and almost childish in her *naïveté*. But I have never thought of her except as a child."

"Well, then, think of her now as grown up. But look at the clock! My last gift to you, Philip! That's an excellent place for it."

"It's a lovely thing, and has been greatly admired. And — it is quite correct."

"I must be off to Shropshire House at once," Lady Mary said, lightly springing up. "You are coming, I suppose? Kitty is there. The Wiltons have taken her."

"I don't know. I have half a mind to turn in early to-night. I'm feeling rather chippy."

"Oh, no! do come. Have n't I just told you that Kitty will be there? And you could begin your campaign at once. Come with me."

"No, I think I had better not make my appearance with you."

"A little late to be so thoughtful of my reputation, is n't it?" she said mischievously.

"I have no reputation of my own to think of; so let me think of yours," he laughed.

Lady Mary was merry, for she had a subtle consciousness of her power over him at that moment.

"Your character's totally gone,
And I have n't sufficient for two."

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she sang softly. "Very well, come on by yourself, if you will. But don't be long. Oh, how I hate going!"

She turned towards him, as he approached her with her cloak, in all the seductiveness of her voluptuous beauty, — beauty potent to melt "mutable minds of wise men as with fire" — even wise men; and Savile was not wise. Their passionate eyes met. "Are you glad, after all, that I came, Philip, my own Philip?" she said, touching his cheek with her soft, white, tapering fingers.

"Yes and no, dearest," he replied — and each word was like a caress, — "for your coming means your going, which I hate; perhaps even more than you hate it. Go you must, however. But —" and his voice was low and tremulous — "but — to-morrow?"

"Yes," she replied, in a half whisper, after a moment which seemed spent in rapid calculation; "to-morrow, if you wish, at four."

He kissed her neck.

"You know where. It won't be indiscreet, will it?" she added with soft mockery.

"No," he muttered, as if thinking aloud, "that dear little, out-of-the-way nest of ours is as safe as any place can be, with its two distinct entrances, your plain dress, and your thick veil. To-morrow, my queen, *there*."

Their lips met in a long kiss.

"Now," she said, disengaging herself gently from his arms, "now take me to my carriage; unnecessary concealment is always a mistake.

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It is best to seem to court observation and to despise public opinion,—even the opinion of one's servants and their public houses."

And so, laughing, they went downstairs, she to her brougham, he to his hansom, which followed at a respectful distance.

CHAPTER V

THE next morning Savile awoke with a feeling of intense dissatisfaction. The intoxication of Lady Mary's presence had passed off, and he thought, with something like annoyance, of their appointment for that afternoon. He had promised to go to see his dear old aunt. He had promised to ride with Lilian. He wanted to try his new purchase, Sunlight. He had totally forgotten all that, when the passion of desire carried him away. Then again, at Lady Mary's bidding, he had begun the campaign against Kitty Karsdale at the party at Shropshire House. And certainly he had no reason to complain of want of success so far. But what were Lady Mary's motives for engaging him in it? Why was she now anxious that he should marry? Was it that her affection for him was on the wane? He could not possibly believe that—especially after last night. Was it that she was actuated by a genuine wish for his ultimate happiness, and sincerely desirous, at any cost to herself, to see him relieved from sordid money

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cares, and taking his proper place in the world? That was possible, indeed; women who loved were sometimes capable of great self-sacrifice, — and Savile found himself dwelling with some complacency upon this beautiful woman's devotion to himself, — but he did not much believe it!

Then he recalled Williamson's visit, and brooded over their talk. The words of that true and tried friend had sunk deep into his mind, already prepared to receive them by the dissatisfaction with himself that had been growing for some time.

Suddenly he rose and rang for telegraph forms.

"I'm sick of everything," he muttered. "To-day will be as yesterday, and the day before; and to-morrow will be the same. I'll cut all my engagements, and say I'm ill, and be off somewhere, where I can be at peace. I'll run over to Dieppe for a few days, and try to work out my life problem by myself."

He took the forms which his servant brought, and hastily wrote, —

"Mrs. Tremenneere, The Cedars, Wimbledon. Rather seedy — am going to Hôtel Royal, Dieppe, for three days. Will come to you next Tuesday. Philip."

Then, taking another form, "Miss Liddell, The Cedars, Wimbledon. So sorry can't come to-day — we will have our ride next Tuesday — am sending down horse and groom for you till then. P. Savile."

Then, "That will do! But now what am I

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to say to Mary? It's a devilish awkward message to send! I'll tell the truth; she'll only find me out if I invent a plea of business; and I really am seedy.

"Lady Mary Silverton, 100, Grosvenor Square. Very chippy—quite knocked out of time—am going to Hôtel Royal, Dieppe. Shall meet you at dinner at Shropshire House Monday. P.

"Thank Heaven that's done. Now I'm off!" And he rang for his servant, and ordered his things to be packed, as he was starting at once for Dieppe.

In another hour he was on his way to New-haven in a reserved compartment; and, tired out by the late hours of the night before, he slept profoundly till he got there.

The day was lovely, with just enough sea on to be pleasant. Savile, with his hands thrust into his pockets, walked up and down the deck, and gazed upon the scene with a lighter mind. For three days, at least, he was far away from dinner parties, luncheon parties, theatres, dances, crushes,—from all the social so-called gaieties that had become intolerably irksome,—and, yes, he must own it, from Lady Mary. He watched with a child's delight the waves as they came quickly up to the sides of the vessel, and took her in their arms, all covered with the silver froth, and then, shy of their boldness, retreated, and showed the wonderful blue lining that lay beneath their pale green covering, while the ship danced and swayed to the throb of her own heart, as she moved to

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each breath of the wind. He felt the spray upon his cheek, and the fresh air upon his face, and gave a sigh of relief at his temporary emancipation. He had not realised how the racket of London had got on his nerves. Now that it was silenced, he determined that he would give his mind "to see life clearly, and to see it whole." His return journey should find him with a definite purpose, a clearly marked line of action. He *must* put an end to his empty, frivolous existence, and act a man's part among men.

It was rather a habit of his to run over to Dieppe when he wanted a quiet day or two. He was at home at the Hôtel Royal, where he was received with the consideration due to an English *grand seigneur*. Tired out, he went to bed directly he had dined. After a long night, he was awoke by the murmurs of the sea reaching him through his open window. He at once set himself to the task for which he had come—to think quietly and clearly. He rang for some tea. And as he was expecting it, the lines came to his mind

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past."

The verses seemed to mock him. Sweet silent thought! His thought was anything but sweet. The remembrance of things past was as wormwood to him. Time wasted, opportunities thrown away, money squandered,—everything sacrificed to the whim of the moment. And here he was, verging on forty, a man about town, with no career before him, heavily involved in debt,

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and bound by the closest ties to a woman, very beautiful indeed, and devoted to him in her way, but utterly unscrupulous, and another man's wife,—a woman of whom he had been passionately enamoured, who still dominated him rather by sensuous habit than through the affections, and of whom he was beginning to tire.

He drank his tea and lit a cigarette.

"Let me take stock of myself," he said. "Let me sum Philip Savile up. Money? None. Beliefs? None. Prospects? None. An old place that I can't live in, and would n't if I could. A position in society which I can't afford to keep up. A mistress whom I could n't leave if I wanted to." And then his mind travelled back over his past. His mother he could not remember. She had died when he was a baby. And he was only ten years old when his father, a distinguished diplomatist, had been carried off by cholera, while on a special mission to Vienna. Liddell, his old tutor, had been almost a father to him. How much he owed that dear old boy, as good an athlete as scholar: his place in the Eleven and the Newcastle, at Eton; a first class in Mods and in Greats and his University blue, at Oxford. And how the old man had rejoiced at his success in Parliament during his short career there. "Poor old Liddell," Savile thought, "he would n't rejoice if he saw me now. It is just fifteen years since he died. And those fifteen years I have wasted, and worse than wasted. What a slice out of a man's life! Let me try to realise how it came about."

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It was plain enough, as he examined his memory. He failed to keep his seat in Parliament at the first General Election after he had entered it. Then society, looking through the eyes of the loveliest women in the world, had smiled on him, and he had become a man of pleasure. It began with the entanglement with Lady Dashly, — the first of a long succession of Delilahs by whom he had been “effeminately vanquished.” And now Lady Mary had become the serious business of his life. What would old Liddell have said? Probably he would have shaken his head, and looked grave, and exclaimed, “All this is horribly wrong, my dear boy, horribly wrong!” Wrong! He had lost the old notions of right and wrong which he had drunk in, somehow, with his Latin and Greek, — notions of which he could have given no clear account, nor, perhaps, could his tutor; notions which were rather traditional than reasoned, Aristotelian than Christian; but which the old man had no more doubted than he had doubted the canons of metre or the laws of logic. And his religious notions, such as they were, had gone the way of his ethical. Who was it that said, “*Les passions sont athées?*” Anyhow, it was true. Were n’t most of men’s actions — at all events, of his actions — the outcome of practical atheism? What wonder? Had n’t modern science — not that he knew much about modern science — passed sentence on the old religious beliefs? He got tired of thinking about it all. It was a labyrinth out of which he could find no clue. He would spend a long day in the open air.

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Yes, he would send for a bicycle, go over to Martin Église and get his *déjeuner* at that pleasant inn by the stream, and then strike off to the left — he remembered the way well — and go up the hill and turn into the forest, and lounge about there, and come back by Arques.

And so he started. The machine they got him was a good one, and as he rode swiftly through the air, pleasant visions floated dimly before him in the sunshine of a way of escape from his embarrassments, and of a better ordering of his life. An admirable *déjeuner*, trout just caught in the stream close by, a fowl roasted to perfection, an omelette made of the freshest of eggs by the lightest of hands, and a bottle of sound Bordeaux, helped further to cheer him. Then, mounting his bicycle, he went on the course he had determined. He lingered long in the forest, made calculations about his debts and the value of his property, thought of friends who might possibly help him to find employment, revolved literary projects, once seriously cherished and long indefinitely shelved, and even conjured up, in imagination, a scene of parting with Lady Mary, and, as a pendant to it, the winning of Kitty Karsdale. The hours passed as his thoughts flowed on under the gentle stimulus of cigarettes, and he hardly noticed the ominous clouds which were swiftly gathering up. At last the storm began to break. There was nothing for it but to get out of the forest as soon as might be, and to ride back with all possible swiftness. The rain fell in torrents, the thunder roared, the lightning

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flashed and played in sinister gleams around his bicycle. "That would be one way out of it," he said to himself grimly. For the rest, he felt a satisfaction in defying the elements.

"Il est bien fou, cet Anglais!" more than one Frenchman observed, as he dismounted at the Hôtel Royal, drenched to the skin, but looking particularly bright.

CHAPTER VI

SAVILE proceeded to divest himself of his wet clothes and to indulge in the luxury of a bath. Then, feeling a new man, he dressed for dinner, and descended to the restaurant, despatching a telegram on the way.

No sooner had he taken his seat at the table reserved for him, than he saw a friend waiting to dine at the next.

"Why, Bassett," he exclaimed, "I *am* glad to see you!"

And so he was. He had come to Dieppe for solitude, indeed. But just at dinner solitude is apt to become oppressive.

Sir Everard Bassett heartily returned the greeting, pleased to have the companionship of one of the cleverest and smartest men in London, and moved to the other table.

"Well," said Savile, "I must offer you my congratulations, M. l'Ambassadeur. But I thought you had gone to your embassy."

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"No," replied Bassett, "I sha'n't go for two or three weeks. I came over this morning to see about some property here belonging to an aunt of mine. To-morrow I go on to Paris for a day. I have several things to do at the Foreign Office before I can get away. And I have promised to run down to the Duke of Shropshire at Bracy Castle for a couple of nights."

"What a trump the Duke is!" Savile exclaimed.

"Yes," Bassett agreed. "I have many reasons for saying that, the last being that I am largely indebted for this appointment to him."

"And the country is largely indebted too," rejoined Savile. "It is the right man in the right place, for once."

"You are very kind," laughed Bassett. "It is pretty much what the Duke was good enough to say. Here is his letter."

Savile took it, and read: —

MY DEAR BASSETT, — Many thanks for your too kind words. I have known you long enough, and well enough, to be quite sure that in urging your claims upon C. I was doing a public service. For the rest,

"I count myself in nothing else so happy,
As in a soul remembering my good friends."

Among whom you are one of the most tried and true.

Always yours,
S.

Come down to the Castle to see me before you depart. I will write again to suggest a date. We go there in about a fortnight, for a few days.

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"That's a letter," said Savile, "that any man — even an Ambassador — might be proud to get. He *does* remember his good friends, and his good friends' children. He has been wonderfully kind to me because of some service my father rendered him long ago. I don't know what it was ; I have n't liked to ask him."

"Curious that you should n't know," Bassett observed. "Well —" after a moment's reflection — "I think you ought to know, and I am violating no confidence in telling you. Five and twenty years ago Henry Bracy — as the Duke was then — and I were attachés together in South America, under your father, the British Minister. Bracy was a fine young fellow, very bright, very clever, and just a trifle fast. He was sowing his wild oats, in fact. There was a woman at the place who was taking the leading part in the Opera, Spanish by her father's side, English by her mother's : quite young, extremely handsome, with the most lovely lustrous eyes I ever saw, and a rich soprano voice. She was married to a Spanish brute who spent some of her earnings in drink, some in gambling, and the rest upon other women. She had a very bad time with him ; and one day, after a violent scene, she left him, and took refuge with Bracy, who was madly in love with her. Her husband, among whose many vices jealousy was one, swore to have Bracy's life. He laughed at the threat ; but the Señora Juanita did n't. One night I had been dining out, and was walking home with two other men who were of the party, when, on

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turning a corner, we saw Bracy some dozen yards in front of us. He had been at the theatre, and was making his way alone to a maisonnette where he had established Juanita. In order to avoid scandal, he seldom appeared in public with her. The moment we had turned the corner, and caught sight of Bracy, we saw a man rush towards him from under a doorway with a long knife which glistened in the moonlight, and try to stab him in the back. But Bracy, who had heard the footsteps, had quickly turned, and, receiving the weapon in the fleshy part of his left arm, had at once closed with his assailant. He had muscles of iron and nerves of iron. He wrested away the knife and, after a few moments' struggle, during which the would-be murderer was half throttled, fairly lifted the fellow off the ground, and threw him to a distance of three or four yards. We had then come up. The whole thing happened in less time than it takes to tell. The assassin was dead—it was afterwards discovered that he had ruptured a blood-vessel in the brain—and we recognised him as Juanita's husband. It was an awkward business; and then your father proved himself the brick he was in pulling Bracy through it. Juanita, who was intensely religious *au fond*, and whose conscience had sorely tortured her during her *liaison* with Bracy, saw in the tragedy a judgment of Heaven on her sin, and took refuge in a convent of Barefooted Carmelites,—a severe and strictly cloistered order, you know. There she remained until her death, some five years ago. Neither Bracy, nor

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anyone else in the outer world, ever saw her again. He was most liberal in his donations to the convent; and when she died he founded a Mass for the repose of her soul."

"A tragic story," said Savile. "You have unlocked the Duke's skeleton cupboard. I suppose we all have one. But fancy his founding a Mass for the poor woman!"

"'It is what she would have wished,' he said, when he wrote to me about it. I was then Minister out there. What a lovely voice she had! We heard it once again — Bracy and I. It was the Sunday before he left for Paris, whither your father got him transferred. We had gone into the convent chapel to attend Benediction that afternoon, and we heard her from behind the grille — there was no mistaking her notes — singing an *Ave Maria* of Schubert's. I saw the tears running down Bracy's cheeks as he listened."

"Poor old boy!" said Savile. "He must have been hard hit."

"Yes, it was a *grande passion*. The whole business sobered him immensely. I doubt if he has ever spoken to a woman in the way of love since."

"It has spoilt his life."

"Well, I don't know. Perhaps it has made his life. He was most successful in the diplomatic service, until his elder brother died and he became Earl Bracy. Then, as you will remember, he went into Parliament, where he was soon recognised as one of the first authorities on

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foreign politics. He is an excellent speaker; but his succession to the dukedom, two years afterwards, cut short his career in the House of Commons."

"He certainly is an admirable speaker, clear, cogent, and, if he likes, caustic. I remember hearing him once or twice in the House of Lords when he was Foreign Secretary. I wonder why he resigned."

"Because, as he put it to me, he had to choose whether he would follow the Prime Minister or his own principles, his cousin or his conscience. I will tell you about that too, if you like. He did n't want it to be known then, for he would do nothing to embarrass the Government. But that Government is a thing of the past; and now, I think, he would rather wish it to be known."

"It will interest me extremely to know," said Savile.

"Well," Bassett continued, "I was employed in the Foreign Office just then. He had given me some special work to do there. One morning he sent for me. 'I'm glad you've finished this job,' he said, 'for I'm going.' I expressed the regret I felt, but of course asked no question. 'I'll tell you, Bassett,' he went on, 'why I'm going. I should like you to know; but, of course, so long as this Government is in, you will keep your knowledge to yourself. I don't choose to stop in a Cabinet which calls itself Conservative, but is doing the dirtiest work of the dirtiest Radicalism. They have n't a prin-

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ciple among them; and their only policy is the Pickwickian—to shout with the largest mob. I will be no party to the annihilation of the ancient franchises of the kingdom and the substitution of a merely numerical system of representation. I will be no party to the establishment of a scheme of secular education which must, in the long run, become predominant, and which must issue, as it has issued elsewhere,—look at France, for example,—in civilised barbarism and thinly disguised animalism. I will be no party to the scandalous neglect of our national defences for fear of losing votes by frankly stating the cost of making them efficient. I quoted yesterday to the Prime Minister the words of Washington: “If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work?” I know he agrees with me in his heart of hearts, but —’and he paused. ‘Well, never mind,’ he continued, ‘I don’t want to weaken the Government. When they go, we shall only get a worse lot in their place. My throat has been troublesome lately, and affords Williamson a sufficient excuse for ordering me abroad. I shall take the blue ribbon they offer me, and go quietly.’ So he went. And since then, as you know, he has devoted himself chiefly to work in his own county, as Lord Lieutenant, Chairman of the County Council, Chairman of Quarter Sessions, to say nothing of the care of his property, which I suppose is the best managed in England.”

“He’s a regular ‘king of men’ down at

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Bracy," said Savile. "And I don't wonder. He is just, genial, and extremely generous."

"He never lets himself be imposed upon," Bassett replied; "but he's wonderfully open-handed. When I was last at the Castle he got an appeal from the Salvationists to help them to build a barrack, as, it seems, they call their meeting-houses. He gave them £50."

"Founding a Mass one day, and building a Salvationist barrack the next!" laughed Savile. "'Philosophical good temper and moderation with regard to every religious creed' was Adam Smith's principle, I remember. I suppose it is the Duke's."

"Pretty much, perhaps!" said Bassett. "I fancied he would draw the line at the Salvationists, however, and told him so. But he said, with a smile, 'I think I ought to import some dancing Dervishes to compete with those howling religionists.'"

"I've sometimes thought," Savile went on, "that he has rather a leaning to Catholicism himself. I know he goes to Mass on Sundays when he's abroad. He's extremely liberal to the Catholic priests on his property, and always has the Catholic bishop to stay at the Castle when opportunity offers."

"He's a great respect for Catholicism," the Ambassador responded. "I remember his quoting to me with assent Carlyle's dictum that 'the Mass is the only genuine relic of religious belief left among us.' But to conform to the Church of Rome, if you happen to be born in it, is one

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thing; to join the Church of Rome, is quite another. I'm sure the Duke could n't make the profession of faith required of a convert. Indeed, he told me once that he could n't get beyond Alexander Pope's teaching in religion or ethics, and that he thought any man fortunate who could get so far. So he remains, as they used to say in the Bidding Prayer at Cambridge, 'in sincere and conscientious communion with the Established Church.' Failing a better religion, he makes the best of the one he has inherited, I suppose. He pays the curate at Bracy, as his chaplain, a hundred a year to read a few prayers every morning in the chapel of the Castle, and often assists at them himself. But he makes it distinctly understood that none of the household need attend unless they like."

"Do you know," Savile said, — he had not been specially interested in his friend's account of the Duke of Shropshire's religious opinions, — "that, much as I like him, he makes me a little uncomfortable. He makes me feel dissatisfied with myself."

Savile's words, and still more the expression in his eyes as he spoke, moved the other man strangely. There was silence for a few minutes. Savile seemed lost in his own thoughts. Bassett did not know what to reply. Then, like an old diplomatist, he took refuge in complete frankness.

"I hope it won't sound uncomplimentary if I say that I understand that. I used to have the same feeling, now and then, when I served under him."

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"I really ought to be doing something," Savile went on, following out his own thought, which was what Bassett meant him to do. "But what am I fit for?"

"I remember," laughed Bassett, "the Dean of Christchurch saying that you could do anything you like."

"I think," Savile continued, "I'll write to my Uncle Bideford, and ask him if he can find me some work."

"A very good idea! Lord Bideford has a good deal of patronage in his own Department, and a good deal of influence with his colleagues in the Cabinet. If you won't mind my saying so, before we separate—I must turn in—I really am glad that you are making this new departure."

They shook hands and said "Good-night."

CHAPTER VII

WHILE Savile was thus spending the first of his two days at Dieppe, he had been much in the thoughts of the three women to whom he had telegraphed before leaving London. His abrupt departure had puzzled Lady Mary—and had annoyed her. What was the real reason of it? Ordinarily, she would have said, "*Cherchez moi la femme.*" But after their interview on Thursday night, she could not admit that explanation; it would have been too mean. No; whatever

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Philip's faults were, hypocrisy was far from him. He could not have displayed that passionate tenderness to her, if he had planned to go off in a few hours with some new fancy. Besides, he made no secret of his address. But why did he not consult her, as he almost invariably did about his arrangements? On the whole she inclined to believe that his telegram was simply candid, that he had felt unwell, and had gone away on the impulse of the moment. So she telegraphed "I am anxious about you; wire to me to-morrow how you are. M." and was relieved on receiving a reply while she was dressing for dinner the next day, "Drenched to the skin, but very fit. M. T."

Now M. T. meant "mille tendresses," which will lead the judicious reader to reflect how much stronger is amorous habit than virtuous resolution.

"After all," she mused, "perhaps it was as well that he should get this brief run out of town, and pull himself together. When he returns he must set to work in earnest and devote himself to Kitty. It would be an easy task; a few attentions from such a man would turn a far more sensible head than hers!" For Lady Mary, who, if she willed a thing willed it strongly, was resolved on the marriage.

Lilian had received her telegram very differently. She had risen early that morning in high spirits, full of anticipation of the happy day she was going to spend in Savile's society. She had taken from its box, for the hundredth time, a dainty little memorandum book with the initials

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"P. S." stamped in gold letters on the cover, and had pictured to herself the pleased look with which he would receive her small birthday offering. After breakfast she had sat down to the piano, and had carefully practised over a few songs he liked, when the servant entered and gave her the telegram. With a chill foreboding of disappointment she opened it. And when the man had left the room, she passionately tore it into a hundred pieces. How unkind! How cruel of him to have broken his promise to ride with her that day in Richmond Park! The tears stole down her cheeks till she heard the sound of approaching footsteps. She hastily dried her eyes and began playing some brilliant dance music.

"Oh, Lilian! here's a dreadful disappointment! Philip is not coming after all!" cried Mrs. Tremenheere as she entered the room. "I am so sorry!"

"Well, dear, I daresay he will come another day," the girl answered calmly.

"Yes, of course he will; but to-day is his birthday, and he always spends it with me. You don't seem a bit sorry!"

"I think it was horrid of him to have disappointed you; but I suppose he has something to do which he likes better."

"Not at all! Poor dear fellow, he is unwell. I do hope it is nothing serious. But perhaps a few days' quiet will do him good. I *am* disappointed. But I must not be selfish. I am going to write to him at once. Have you any message for him?"

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"Yes. Please thank him, auntie dear, for sending down a horse for me to ride, and give him my best birthday wishes, and say I am too busy with my music to write."

"Do you mean to say that he has sent down a horse for you to ride?"

"So he says in the telegram. But I sha'n't ride to-day. Perhaps I may to-morrow."

"He has telegraphed to you, and is sending you a horse, and you won't take the trouble to write and thank him yourself? On his birthday too! Really, Lilian, I think it is rather unkind of you! I can't understand you! You are always so sweet to me; and to poor Philip, who has always been so nice to you, you are sometimes quite rude!"

"Oh, auntie dear, don't be angry with me, for I have got such a headache!"

The pent-up tears would make a way for themselves, and Lilian, springing up from the piano, flung her arms round Mrs. Tremeneere's neck and sobbed.

The kind old lady was mollified at once. "Ah! I knew you could n't be well," she said, petting and comforting her. "It takes a great deal to make you cry."

And Lilian, ashamed of her outburst of feeling, and of her pretence of a headache to veil it, submitted to be made much of, and promised to rest till luncheon — of which meal the two women partook alone; for Adolf von Kleist had telegraphed to excuse himself.

By that time she had recovered her composure.

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Later in the afternoon she gratified Mrs. Tremenheere by saying, "I should like to add a postscript on my own account to your letter, if I may."

This was the postscript. "How kind of you to send the horse ; but it is a poor substitute for you. Best birthday wishes, my dear guardian. Lilian."

CHAPTER VIII

LADY HELENA BRACY was seated in the large drawing-room at Shropshire House on Monday evening, waiting to receive her guests. She had lived with her brother, the Duke of Shropshire, since he came into the title, and had studied his happiness and comfort in every way. Society rather owed the gentle and amiable woman a grudge for it. If she had made him less happy and comfortable, would he not long ago have chosen a wife from among the many girls, of all types of loveliness and varieties of temperament, carefully brought to his notice by fond mothers who were anxious to secure for their darlings the greatest match in London? But no "compunctious visitings of conscience" for all these blighted aspirations troubled Lady Helena. She earnestly hoped, and fully believed, that her brother would marry some day — the more especially as the heir presumptive to the dukedom was by no means a favourite of hers or his. But in this, as in all other matters,

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she trusted his judgment implicitly. He would marry when he met the right woman. When! But where was the woman who was good enough for him? That thought was in her mind as she glanced round the vast and well-proportioned room. When would the destined princess come to it? It was profusely decorated in the First Empire style. Hangings of deep crimson silk were let into carved gilt panels on the walls. There were some magnificent pictures. And on the mantelpieces stood large Cloisonné vases worth their weight in gold. Electric lights had been fitted in old French girandoles, and also in the large Empire chandeliers that hung in the centre. Lady Helena reflected with satisfaction that few houses in London could vie in beauty with Shropshire House. When would the next Duchess come to reign in it?

While she was thus musing, a servant entered and handed her a telegram. It was from Lady Mary Silverton, saying that she had missed the train from Brighton, but had telegraphed to her husband to take his niece Kitty Karsdale with him in her place, and that she would look in herself later in the evening.

"Look here, Henry," Lady Helena said as the Duke entered the room. "How very tiresome! Here is Mary Silverton's telegram to say she has missed her train, and is sending that little Kitty Karsdale in her stead. This will alter everything. I must re-arrange the way they will have to sit."

"It does n't matter much. Kitty Karsdale is

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a very bright and amusing little thing," the Duke said indifferently.

"Amusing, perhaps; but — well, slightly loud, don't you think?"

"I think I rather like loud people."

"My dear Henry!" And Lady Helena looked with surprise at her brother, whose appearance certainly gave no indication of such a taste.

He was a tall, well-preserved man, verging on fifty, his brown hair slightly streaked with grey, his nose rather prominent, his face clean shaven, with the exception of a well-trimmed moustache. His broad forehead and resolute hazel eyes spoke of intellectual strength, as his admirably proportioned and closely knit frame did of physical. At once dignified, urbane, and considerate, with a slight vein of gentle and genial cynicism, his honours sat lightly upon him. He looked the great prince he was.

"Mr. Silverton and Miss Karsdale!"

And the Duke and his sister advanced to meet their guests.

"I hope you don't mind my coming instead of Aunt Mary, Duke," Kitty Karsdale said, as she looked up at him with laughing, roguish eyes.

"It is always a pleasure to see you, you bright little lady," he replied in his deep, candid tones, glancing appreciatively at the slight, piquant figure before him, with her dainty features, clear complexion, and wavy chestnut hair. Her dress was a little too fashionable, and savoured too much of American taste, quite to satisfy him.

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But the *tout ensemble* was very good to look upon. Of which fact no one was better aware than Miss Kitty Karsdale herself.

The other guests arrived in quick succession. Sir John and Lady Linton, — she a young woman, very smart, very *decolletée*, exquisitely dressed; her husband some ten years older, self-possessed, self-complacent, and a little or as severe critics said, not a little priggish. Then Mr. O'Flaherty, with his brogue and his bright eyes, looking very happy and pleased with himself, and Lady Dewsbury and Mrs. Twistleton with her son Lionel.

Mrs. Tremeneheere and Lilian made their appearance last, and were greeted with special friendliness by Lady Helena. Lilian looked quickly round the room in search of Savile's tall figure, not knowing that he had telegraphed in the morning to say he should arrive too late from abroad, but would put in an appearance in the evening. Mr. Lionel Twistleton, a rising young diplomatist, had been asked to fill his place, and took her in to dinner. Though he talked much and well, he was soon aware that he but moderately interested his companion, and marvelled that a girl as clever as she was lovely should be so little appreciative of his parts and graces. She was glad when the dinner came to an end, and the ladies went to the drawing-room. There, in spite of her disappointment, and her many glances at the door, she could not help being amused at the conversation that went on.

"What a droll man that Mr. O'Flaherty is!"

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Lady Dewsbury began. "Where did you pick him up, Helena?"

"We met him at Mary Silverton's. For some reason, he seems quite a lion this season; and Henry told me to ask him to dinner. Ah! here she is, she will tell you all about him," as Lady Mary entered the room, apologising gracefully for having been compelled to send her husband's niece in her stead.

"I am so sorry, but I thought you would rather have Kitty than a disarranged table. I never missed a train before. It is most annoying to see the horrid thing rushing out of the station absolutely regardless of the fact that one has a dinner engagement."

Lady Mary looked unusually handsome. The air of Brighton had refreshed her; and the certainty that she would meet Philip had softened the somewhat haughty eyes. Lady Dewsbury exclaimed: "Really, Mary, you look splendid to-night! A very personification of 'Eight hours at the seaside!' And what a lovely dress you have on!"

"Yes, it's not bad. And now what do you want to know about Mr. O'Flaherty?"

"Only where you discovered him."

"At Lady Priscilla Barnum's menagerie, with a lot of other beasts, clean and unclean! He is very useful to my husband, whose constituents read his society paper and highly esteem him as a prophet of social purity."

"Whatever prophet he is, he is an amusing *raconteur*. He gives his stories a deliciously vul-

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gar flavour which is all his own and very piquant. Then his brogue is inimitable !”

“Yes; no doubt he brought it from his native cabin as his outfit in life. But he must have taken pains to cultivate it, for such a breadth of vowels is not in nature. He talks like his own caricature.”

“I must say I thought some of his stories decidedly profane,” Mrs. Twistleton interrupted. And then, slightly discomposed by the cold silence in which her remark was received, though proud of having delivered her testimony, she rose quickly and joined Miss Karsdale.

“Dear Mrs. Twistleton !” Lady Dewsbury murmured ironically, “how good she is ! She always has her eyes fixed on the next world !”

“One eye, perhaps—the other is steadily directed to the main chance for her son.” And Lady Mary smiled as she took in the details of Mrs. Twistleton’s ill-made dress. “Ah ! here come the men,” she said, “and the Duke is going to talk to Mrs. Tremeneere. I never did care for that old woman, and can’t understand what Philip Savile sees in her, though she is his aunt. There is that *protégée* of hers, Miss Liddell ; she’s a governess, I believe. Do you consider her pretty ?”

Lady Dewsbury raised her tortoise-shell eyeglasses, and stared at Lilian. “Hum—yes ; she’s more than pretty, she’s lovely. There can’t be a doubt about that ; but she is a shade too pale, perhaps.” (Lady Dewsbury’s colouring was very brilliant.) “And she is decidedly smart.

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Not much like a governess! And what in the world is she doing here?"

"She has come with Mrs. Tremeneere, who brought her up, and looks upon her almost as a daughter, and, I hear, wants to keep her always. But the girl's as proud as she is penniless, and insists upon earning her own living."

"Pride's an expensive luxury for paupers. She had better stick to the old woman. Look, Mary, the Duke seems rather gone on her. I wonder what he's saying."

"He always has that manner with girls who at all interest him. Poor wretches, they spend their time in pulling down the hopes his attentions have raised."

The Duke had turned to Mrs. Tremeneere. "You really ought not to bury yourself at Wimbledon," he said. "It is much longer than I like to think of since I have seen you in my house."

"Ah, Duke, I am not young enough, or strong enough, for the racket of London — am I, Lilian? But it was so nice meeting you and Lady Helena at Covent Garden the other evening! And, do you know, it was a great treat to us both to hear *Die Walküre* for the first time."

"Are you a great Wagnerian, Miss Liddell?" the Duke asked.

"No, I don't think so; for all the time I am trying to resist a sort of spell that he seems to be casting over me."

"I understand what you mean," the Duke answered, looking at her with great interest.

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"That is rather what I feel, and is, perhaps, why I specially like him. He is a great enchanter. I see visions and dream dreams when I listen to him."

"Ah! but I don't want to dream; I want to put away my dreams!"

"Well, but dreams may console us for the realities which seem out of our reach" (Lilian gave a little involuntary start), "and sometimes they come true when we have, like you, the happy privilege of youth and beauty."

"Thank you, Duke," she said with a smile.

But he was a keen observer, and noticed the start, and the far-away look in her eyes, and heard the short sigh that escaped her unawares.

"Ah! there is Savile talking to my sister. He must come and entertain some of you young ladies."

"And I will go and fetch Mrs. Tremeneere's shawl; she has rather a cold to-night." And Lilian, with a sudden flush in her pale cheeks, rose to her feet.

"We will go together, for Mrs. Tremeneere has gone across to speak to Silverton. How handsome his wife is looking to-night!"

The Duke and Lilian joined the other group, and Mrs. Twistleton quickly addressed herself to her host.

"Now, Duke, is not Mr. Silverton our greatest oracle of finance?"

"I don't pretend to be an oracle, though I sometimes work the oracle," Mr. Silverton said with a laugh.

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"The utterances of the oracles of ancient times," Sir John Linton began in pompous tones, "were always ambiguous, and admitted of several explanations, equally plausible. I think our modern oracles, both political and financial, are of the same character. Don't you agree with me, Duke?"

"I do not exercise myself in great matters which are too high for me, — *la haute finance*, for example."

And everyone laughed, as in duty bound when a ducal host is pleased to depreciate his own talents.

Then the Duke walked off to join his sister and Philip Savile, who were in deep discussion over a new way of cooking truffles which the *chef* at the Hôtel Royal at Dieppe had invented, or said he had.

Sir John Linton quickly followed; he felt that he could enlighten his host upon many points, and was burning to continue the conversation.

At this moment Mr. O'Flaherty crossed the room, and Savile asked the Duke who he was.

"Amusing chap! Don't you know him? He is the proprietor and editor of 'Progress' and 'Society Snapshots.'"

"No, I never met him before. Is he really very amusing? Those funny men often are n't."

"Oh, he said some very good things at dinner," Sir John put in. "Don't you agree, Duke?"

"Yes, he makes one laugh. But he would be more successful if he were more reticent. A *bon mot* ought to be like a good picture; it should

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interest more by what it suggests than by what it says."

"Yes, that is so. But I think that that was a very sharp saying of his, and a very true one, that Candlish might have retrieved his position if he had had the courage of his vices. So was his remark that Digby's face displays the melancholy of a fool half conscious of being one."

"Yes, that was really quite smart! It exactly hits off Digby!" and Savile showed his white teeth, as he did when he was amused.

In doing so, he annoyed two women who were watching him. Lady Mary marvelled how he could stand there talking to two men when she was in the room, and had only exchanged a couple of words with him as yet. And Lilian wondered if she would go home, and never say one word to him, and thought that instead of laughing and enjoying himself, he might come and speak to his aunt after having been away for a week. Well, it seemed like a week!

But Savile was thoroughly interested in what was being said to him. It was one of his charms that he could throw himself into the occupation of the moment, whatever that might be.

"Quite clever, too," he went on, "that saying about Candlish. It was the boggy of the Nonconformist conscience that frightened the poor fellow. He lost his head, and his seat in Parliament, at the same time."

"Well, I can sympathise with him," said Silverton. "'Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,'—the Nonconformist conscience. I

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don't mind confessing that I am horribly afraid of it. It is very lively among my constituents, and began to worry me a short time ago, when I hit on the happy thought — or rather, O'Flaherty suggested it — of getting myself made President of the Local Vigilance Committee. *That* check-mated them! And I really find looking after the morals of other people rather amusing! Indeed, there is a good deal of fun to be had among the purity people, if you get into the inner ring!"

The Duke laughed.

"Ah! so that latest development of altruism brings its own reward, does it? What, are you leaving us, Savile?"

"Yes, Duke. Lady Linton is making signs to me."

The Duke was about to rise at the same time to join another group, when Sir John stopped him by saying, —

"By the way, Duke, can you tell me whether it is true that Savile has refused that appointment which I hear Lord Bideford has offered him?"

"Yes, it is true; he has just told me so himself. He felt it would be too gross a job, and declined at once, fearing, he said, that he might not have the courage to do so afterwards. I am sorry, in a way, for he wants the salary badly, and could have done the work quite well. He stretched forth his hands towards the mess of pottage and drew them back, feeling it was too great a mess. But he will have to suffer for the

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delicacy of his digestion, I fear. I suppose that I must try and get something else for him. His father was very kind to me when I was a young man and a younger son."

"Well, I think that the Government ought to be very much obliged to him for his refusal. There would have been a tremendous row over that appointment. How could Lord Bideford have thought of making it?"

"Bideford," said Silverton, who had just come up, "has a soft heart and a wooden head, — not an uncommon combination, Linton."

"Bideford," the Duke rejoined, "is a great friend of mine; but I won't vindicate him just now, for we must not stop here longer talking politics, or rather jobs, — but is there much difference? Some music is being started in the music room. Let us join the others."

The music at Shropshire House was very good; and the pleasure of having a fine room devoted to it was greatly appreciated by the long-suffering artists, and by those who really cared to listen; while others who preferred to hear their own voices could find quiet corners elsewhere for a tête-à-tête, or could remain in the large drawing-rooms.

Lilian had accompanied Mrs. Tremeneere to the music room directly the sound of a violin reached their ears, and had placed herself near the door. She had hoped that Sir Philip Savile would catch sight of them and would join them. But she was disappointed; it was the Duke who came up and took the vacant seat. Savile was

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otherwise engaged. Lady Mary had smiled at him, and, with a slight motion of her fan, had beckoned him to her side.

"Would you like to go and hear the music?" he asked.

"No, I would rather sit here; I want you to tell me all you have been doing at Dieppe."

"I was very busy doing nothing. That is what I went to Dieppe to do. I had a long day's bicycling, at the close of which I was caught in a thunderstorm. I dined, and had a most interesting talk with Bassett, the new Ambassador. I spent the next day sailing; and to-day I have come home, feeling quite set up."

"You are looking wonderfully well now. You were right to go; although," she added in a low tone, "I did n't at all like it." And forgetting, in the joy of having him by her side, her vexation at his abrupt departure, she turned her eyes upon him, and sent the passion in them through him, burning up all his good resolutions.

"You are looking absolutely lovely yourself," he said in a tender voice, pitched so as to reach only her ear.

"Hush!" she said, glancing round, "people are always listening at these sort of parties. Tell me," as the Duke approached, "why is Mr. Vane so devoted to Mrs. Wyndham? She is such a stupid woman, and he is so clever."

"Well, she is a handsome woman, and her hair is wonderful. The old Greeks, who were wise people, liked the combination of long hair and short thought. Besides, there is always a

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charm about a beautiful and stupid woman. She is a rest to the mind, and a pasture to the eye."

The Duke, who had paused for a moment, laughed, said, "Good, very good!" and crossed the room.

"I can't see it," Lady Mary replied. "Stupidity irritates me more than anything else. A stupid man bores me to extinction, however handsome he may be. 'With stupidity the gods themselves fight in vain,' somebody says."

"Schiller."

"Clever boy! Go up one!"

"No," he said. "I am happy where I am." Then, in a lower tone, "I like the dress you are wearing to-night, Mary. It is like dewdrops upon snow."

"A poetical way of describing a white satin and chiffon gown, with diamonds sewn about!" she laughed. "But what a tiresome lot of people there are that keep on coming and sitting near us; and I want to talk seriously to you. Let us go into Helena's boudoir, which leads out of this room."

They rose and went into the boudoir, — an exquisite little room, an exact copy of one of Marie Antoinette's at the Trianon.

"This is rather nice. Do you mind coming here out of the sound of the music?" she said, as she sat down on a small settee.

"No, I am love-loyal to your least wish."

"'Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen.' Well, I don't think that I am much like Guinevere."

"And I don't pose as Launcelot."

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"And my husband does not resemble the immaculate Arthur, does he?" she asked with a mocking laugh. "I am told that in the City they call him the Silver King."

"Don't you think we might leave your husband out?" Philip said with a slight frown.

"It appears to me that we generally do contrive to leave him out," she replied calmly. "He does not come much into my life. He comes more into Mademoiselle Bergerac's just now! I hear he gave her £5,000 worth of diamonds last week. Well, he is quite welcome to give her £10,000 worth, so far as I am concerned. Don't let's talk of him any more."

"It is not a subject which has any special charm for me," Savile said rather moodily.

"No," replied Lady Mary, in tender tones, "let us talk of yourself, Philip."

"That is a subject which interests me still less. On my return to-night I was greeted with a letter from Moss peremptorily declining to renew, and threatening proceedings in bankruptcy."

"Oh, my poor Philip, how annoying! There is only one thing for you to do, and that without a moment's delay. You must go in at once for Kitty. Directly Moss and the forty thieves confederate with him hear that you are engaged to marry such a heap of money, they will leave you in peace. I know of a way to keep them quiet for a time. But you must go and pay attention to Kitty — now, at once, this very evening!"

"Do you seriously wish me to marry Silver-ton's niece?" he asked looking at her gravely.

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"Seriously, I do."

"Mary, have you counted the cost?"

"What cost? It will cost *us* nothing!"

"Do you mean — no, you can't!" and his face flushed a deep red.

"Yes, I can and do! Why not? It is the way of the world; that sort of thing is done every day. And so far as we are concerned, it will be a great advantage that you should be married."

"But, Mary, the girl herself?" he said between his teeth.

"Oh, she won't suspect anything; she is a little fool! And surely you and I can manage to keep our own counsel."

"Upon my word," said Savile, "it would be too bad; it would be horribly unfair to her."

"How absurd you are, Philip! As though it would make any real difference to her! You are no Joseph, as I know too well. Is it likely that you will be faithful to her? Why, you are n't faithful even to me! If she had sense enough to think the thing out, she wouldn't expect it. If it were not me, it would be someone else. And it will be a great advantage to her that it should be *me*! I am rather fond of the girl, and am showing my affection by arranging a marriage between you. Should I send *you* to her if I did n't like her? She ought to be very much obliged to me."

He gave a harsh laugh, and she glanced quickly at him.

"Now, Philip, don't be ridiculous. There is no other course open to you, and I assure you

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everything will go well, if you will only take my advice. How that girl is glaring at me!" she said suddenly, as Lilian passed the open door with the Duke, and stood for a moment listening, or not listening, to his remarks about a picture. "You must introduce her to me later on. It is rather amusing to be glared at! Now take me down to have some champagne and oysters. I had only the most hurried dinner." And Lady Mary rose, and together they passed down the stairs.

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning Lilian was busy in the morning room of Mrs. Tremenheere's house at Wimbledon arranging a great quantity of flowers which had been brought in from the old lady's much-loved garden. At last she said, "Ah, that will do. But, dear auntie, how gay you are getting! I had no idea you had asked so many people here to-day."

"Well, I had only intended to ask the Duke, as he said he wanted to see my flowers, and of course Philip. And then Mr. O'Flaherty was standing close by, and looked so much as if he would like to come, that somehow I asked him. And then Philip begged me to ask Lady Mary, and she asked if she might bring Miss Karsdale; and then Mr. Twistleton asked if he might come too; and so I could not help it."

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"I can't think how you can care to have Lady Mary here. She seems to me a dreadful woman." Lilian's hands trembled so that she spilt the water as she tried to pour it into the vase.

"My dear child! why have you taken a dislike to her? It is not like you; and she is really a very pleasant woman and a great friend of Philip's."

"I hated the expression of her face when I saw it for the first time in that photograph on Philip's mantelpiece. She looks like a beautiful wild beast, a tigress or a panther. What cruel eyes!" and Lilian's breath came quickly.

"My dear Lilian, she is a most handsome woman, and everyone admires her. I did not know that you were given to taking such violent antipathies. Why, you have only seen her once at that party at Shropshire House, where I am sure you enjoyed yourself very much. The Duke was most attentive to you. I never saw him pay so much attention to a young girl before!" And Mrs. Tremenheere glanced at her favourite, and wondered if a ducal coronet might perchance fall upon that fair head. It was quite possible. The Duke, Mrs. Tremenheere was shrewd enough to guess, had never married simply because he had never found the right woman. Was Lilian the right woman? It would be Cophetua and the Beggar Maid. But the duke was a greater prince than Cophetua, and Lilian looked, and moved, and spoke like a princess.

"Yes, he is a kind old man," the girl answered absently, unaware of the ambitious scheme that was floating through Mrs. Tremenheere's brain.

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"Old man!" she almost screamed. "Old! Why, he is only forty-nine! in the very prime of life!"

"It sounds a little old, I think," said Lilian, unheeding Mrs. Tremenheere's discomposure.

"Nonsense! You'll be calling Philip old next!" she replied, with the nearest approach to asperity her voice could take.

"Lady Mary is a married woman, is n't she?" Lilian went on.

"Yes. Don't you remember Mr. Silverton was there last night?"

"She does not behave like one."

"My dear Lilian, what *do* you mean?"

"I mean the way in which she talked to Philip, and looked at him, as if — as if —"

"As if she admired him!" Mrs. Tremenheere interrupted. "And what of that? Of course she admires him. Most women do. He is so clever and so attractive! Now do get on with those flowers."

The poor lady was desperately anxious to change the conversation. She was not deeply versed in the gossip and scandal of the day, but she knew enough of it to dislike this particular topic. Lilian, however, continued calmly, —

"But I could see that he admires her. How can he?"

"They are very great friends; and she has a singular power of attraction."

"I don't think that married women ought to have great men friends," Lilian said doggedly. "And Lady Mary magnetises him."

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"My dear child! why on earth are you talking in this foolish manner?" Mrs. Tremenhoe exclaimed in despair. "And why have you taken such an unreasoning dislike to poor Lady Mary? You seem to have turned against Philip too; and you used to be so fond of him."

"I *am* fond of him," Lilian said, repressing a sob in her throat. "But he is so taken up with his friends in London that we hardly ever see him now, and — and he has forgotten all about his promise to come and ride with me."

"Nonsense, my dear, he is very busy, and very much in request; and I am sure he always comes whenever he can! Ah, here they are! Now let us go and meet them."

Welcomed guests had never come. The dear old lady was at her wit's end.

The Duke had driven the party down on his coach, and they were soon seated at luncheon. He managed to secure a place near Lilian which she had fondly hoped Savile would have filled. But Savile had not left Lady Mary's side since he had assisted her off the box seat; and except for a few affectionate words of greeting to his aunt and Lilian, he seemed absorbed with his companion.

"What do you think of the new Juliet?" the Duke asked Lady Mary across the table. He liked to make the conversation general.

"Very good indeed! What do you think?"

"I like her, but Miss Liddell thinks she is too old for the part."

"No mere girl could play it," Lady Mary said

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decidedly, wondering if that pale child imagined that she herself would be an ideal Juliet.

"Perhaps not," Savile observed. "A young girl, in these latitudes, seldom knows her own heart. Under the hot Southern sun there are no young girls. It is yesterday a child; to-day a woman."

"These are heresies," smiled the Duke. "Don't you think so, Miss Liddell?"

"I was thinking," said Lilian, "of the lines,

" 'Bright and fair and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North.' "

"Anyhow, Tennyson got a little mixed there," Savile remarked. "'Dark and true and tender' is a picture of the Southern Juliet."

"Yes, Juliet is a woman, not a girl. A girl loves the man's admiration; the woman loves the man," Lady Mary said rather contemptuously. She had put her own construction upon a look in Lilian's eyes, which were at that moment turned on Savile.

"There are girls and girls, and women and women," the Duke interposed. "The first time Elaine sees Launcelot, she loves him with that love that was her doom."

"I think I am rather tired of Tennyson," Lady Mary said languidly. "He is the school-girl's poet; and all the penny novelettes are full of cheap quotations from his most mawkish productions. Let us try to be a little original."

Lilian's heart grew hot within her. She resented the tone of supercilious disdain in which

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Lady Mary had spoken of girls ; and Tennyson was one of her favourite poets.

"Are we not always original when we are true?" she said.

"Too original, perhaps, for good society," Mr. O'Flaherty observed. "It is so largely made up of bad people."

"You editors know too much," laughed Lady Mary. "You know all—and more. But I want to hear Mr. Twistleton's contribution to this symposium."

"Well," said the young diplomatist, "I find originality a bore ; but veracity is infinitely worse. When my dearest friend begins, 'Now, to be perfectly frank,' I know that he—or she—is going to be perfectly insufferable."

Everyone laughed except Savile, who said with unwonted gravity, "Truth is often very trying—like the early sun if one has been up till the small hours of the morning. But the the fault is n't in the sun, or in truth, is it?"

Lilian looked pleased. But Mrs. Tremeneere, who thought the discussion had gone far enough, interposed,—

"Now shall we have our coffee outside?"

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CHAPTER X

THEY rose, and moved into the fine old garden, with its bright flowers full of fragrance, with its goodly cedar-trees in the grateful shade of which chairs and tables were arranged. Savile had looked several times at Lilian, wondering when he should find an opportunity for a few words with her alone. He wanted to fulfil his promise to Kleist, who had reminded him of it in an urgently anxious letter which had that morning reached him. But in Lady Mary's presence he was not his own master. And he saw that she intended him to devote himself to her, or to carrying out her orders by laying siege to Kitty Karsdale's heart and fortune.

That was the enterprise to which Lionel Twistleton addressed himself as soon as they were in the garden. Kitty had flung herself down on a large Oriental rug, exclaiming, "What a dear delightful place this is!"

"Delightful things generally are dear," Mr. O'Flaherty, who was standing by, observed. And he spoke with an air of conviction, as if he knew what he was talking about, which, indeed, he did.

But Kitty said, "Dear things are generally delightful; that's the view I take!"

Twistleton strongly applauded the sentiment, rather pointedly ignoring O'Flaherty. The quick-witted journalist saw that he was *de trop*,

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and judged that it would be in good taste—he piqued himself on his good taste—to take himself away. Then Twistleton sat down on a cushion at Kitty's feet and took up his parable.

"Talking of delightful things, that is a delightful frock, Miss Karsdale, if I may say so."

"Well," replied Kitty, with a teasing laugh, "I don't know that you may. Suppose I were to say, 'What a delightful cravat, Mr. Twistleton,' or, 'What a love of a waistcoat!' or, 'What a darling coat!' would n't you think me rather—rather—"

"I should think you rather nice, or, indeed, very," replied Twistleton, entering into the girl's bantering humour. "But if I may not be permitted to say that your frock is delightful, I can't help thinking that you look killing."

"Anyhow, I sha'n't kill *you* !

" ' Who killed Cock Robin ?
I, said the Sparrow,
With my bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin ! ' "

Do you know, you look exactly like Cock Robin?" And she burst into a merry peal of laughter. "But I am not the sparrow, and I have no bow and arrow."

"Oh," said Twistleton, "don't say that ! You wield Cupid's bow and arrow."

"How pretty, and how original ! And you to pretend, as you did just now, that you dislike originality ! I knew it was coming. Was n't that clever of me ? And was n't it nice of me to

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give you an opportunity of saying it? But don't you like my poetry?"

"Charming!" the young man replied, not quite sure, however, whether he did like so much chaff, even from this pretty heiress. "Where did you get it? Is it your own composition? I seem to have heard it before."

"Ah! I knew you would recognise it, you are so clever. It is Browning. Don't you young men about town read Browning hard? I suppose you *are* a young man, Mr. Twistleton. I am so stupid that I never know who are young men and who are old. I declare that is about the youngest man I know!" looking towards the Duke of Shropshire, who was coming up with Lady Mary and Savile. "He is so fresh and natural. Are n't you going to speak to me this afternoon, Duke?"

"Of course I am," said the Duke, laughing. "Do I ever lose an opportunity of a tête-a-tête with you? I am just going with Mrs. Tremeneere to look at her orchids, and then I shall ask for permission to bask in your smiles for a little."

"Go and take Kitty to see something," Lady Mary said to Savile in a low voice, as the Duke walked away.

"I would rather stay with you," he murmured.

"Business must come before pleasure," she answered with a smile which Savile called his own, for she gave it to no one else; "and we shall meet later on."

"Really, if the country was always like this,

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"I should n't dislike living in it so much," Lady Mary said to Twistleton.

"What would London do without its Lady Mary Silverton?" he replied gallantly.

"What would Lady Mary Silverton do without her London?" laughed Kitty.

"Well," she replied, "I can't imagine a more awful existence than to be buried in some wretched little village, with a mothers' meeting and tea at the Rectory as one's only wild dissipation."

"You cannot have any enemies, Lady Mary, but if you had, you could curse them with Rochester's curse to the dog that bit him: 'I wish you were married and living in the country!'"

"That is very aptly quoted, Mr. Twistleton," she said. "But how Mr. O'Flaherty is making them laugh! Let us go and listen to one of his stories."

CHAPTER XI

"MY aunt," said Savile, turning to the bright, piquant little figure on the gorgeous-coloured rug, "has many surprises in this small place of hers. There is a golden pheasant somewhere, and there is a monkey in a cage, and there are some wonderful white rabbits. Will you come and inspect her private Zoo?"

"I shall be delighted."

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Accepting Philip's offered hand, Kitty sprang up from the grass, and they wandered off out of sight of the rest of the party. Lilian repressed a sigh. Was Philip never going to speak to her again? She was glad he had left that horrible woman with the beautiful, hard face and the air of proprietorship. But her keen eyes had detected that it was at Lady Mary's bidding that he had gone to Miss Karsdale.

"I was wondering if you were going to honour me with any notice to-day," Kitty began, as she looked up into Savile's face with her bright, brown, laughing eyes.

"You are always so much in request that this was my first opportunity," he said somewhat lamely.

"Well now, I believe you only came then because Aunt Mary said, 'Do go and talk to that wretched little Kitty, she is getting so bored by Mr. Twistleton!' I wonder why everyone calls me 'little!' I am five feet eight in my stockings."

"It is because everyone likes you. How can they help it? Hate magnifies, love diminishes. Hence pet names."

"And yet pet names are generally longer than the names they diminish. How do you explain that?"

"Well, I can't. Ask me another."

"So I will, and a poser this time. Sometimes I think Aunt Mary is very fond of me; sometimes I think she is n't. Now, how does your wisdom explain that?"

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"It is quite easy. You are right when you think she is very fond of you, and wrong when you think she is n't."

"I am not sure. You are very fond of her, are n't you?"

"I think she is perfectly charming," Philip said calmly, but with a feeling of irritation that the blood was mounting into his face. "Is there anything more terrible than an *ingénue*?" he thought.

"So everybody says; and I know she is awfully good to me. I ought not to have said what I did just now. I wish I had n't. But you won't tell her, will you? You promise me — honour bright?"

"I give you my word of honour."

"I know I can trust it," said the girl, simply. "I wish I were like Aunt Mary. She is so calm and collected, and never takes any trouble about anybody, and yet everybody rushes to her feet, and they don't want to get up again."

"You need not wish to be like anybody else, for you possess a very great charm of your own." And Philip looked at her with real admiration.

"I am glad you think so. Some people say I am horrid!"

"Impossible, unless they are blind, deaf, and paralytic!"

"They say I am fast, and a flirt, and horrid all round! Do *you* think that I am fast or a flirt?"

"No, I think you are altogether nice. And why should n't you flirt, if you like? But don't with me."

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"Why not? Are you dangerous? Or are you somebody else's property?"

"Certainly not!" and Savile found himself flushing again. "But I should not like you to trifle with me, for I am always in earnest, and, though you may not think it, I happen to possess a heart."

"No, really? Do you keep a heart under that beautiful waistcoat?" she laughed. But it was her turn to colour, for Savile was looking into her eyes, and his manner said more than his words.

"Where else should I keep it? Not on my sleeve, surely, 'for daws to peck at.' But I should like to give it to someone else who would care to have it for always, and would give me hers in return." And his voice took a very tender tone.

"But suppose they did not fit? How awkward that would be! You would have to go to a shop where they 'make to fit while you wait!'"

He laughed, and then said earnestly, —

"But I think those little white hands of yours would know what to do with a man's heart when it was offered to you."

"If it was pretty, and nice, and fat, not a long, thin, ugly one, — for hearts are made in such different shapes, — I might tie it to mine with a blue ribbon, like an old-fashioned valentine! But what rubbish we are talking! And Aunt Mary says you are so clever! I am afraid you are talking down to my intellect! Now let us be serious."

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"Nothing I should like better ; but are you ever serious ?"

"Yes, perfectly awe-inspiring at times, when I am cross or bored, or with people I don't like."

"You are certainly not cross now, and I hope you are not bored — and — you don't dislike me, do you ?"

"No, I like you very much — I liked you the first moment I saw you. I wonder why it is that sometimes when you meet someone you never saw before, you suddenly feel absolutely murderous towards them ; and then another total stranger appears, and you feel as if you loved them at once !"

"A clever woman once explained sudden sympathies and antipathies by the theory that we are each of us enveloped with a personal atmosphere ; and that when two atmospheres touch, they either break into invisible explosions, and clash and wrangle together, or else mingle and combine quite happily — as is the case with us, you know."

"What a clever idea ! I shall dine out on that several times. And the man who takes me in to dinner will think me awfully clever and original. Oh, I did make such a mess of it last night !"

"How ?" said Savile, smiling at her tragicomic air. "What in the world did you do ?"

"I'll tell you. We were dining at the Wiltons', and Lord Chettisham took me in to dinner : an old man with a bald head and no teeth — at least, they are false ones, I am sure — and white whiskers, and a beautiful red ribbon of the

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Bath. He talked to me about all sorts of clever things: Plato, and primogeniture, and political economy—I think he took me for a Girton girl—and he asked me if I knew any of Mill. I wanted to be nice to the stupid old man, so I said, ‘Oh, yes, I remember seeing a book of his, *On the Floss*. The man on the other side of me laughed, and Lord Chettisham looked very cross, and would hardly speak to me afterwards. I suppose he thought I was making game of him,—which I was n’t, really,—for the man on the other side—such a nice young man—told me *The Mill on the Floss* was a novel. I had mixed up floss and flotsam, which is something in political economy, is n’t it?’”

“No,” laughed Savile, “it is something in law—flotsam and jetsam, you know.”

Kitty shook her head in negation.

“Never mind. But it served that pedantic old prig Chettisham right.”

“Well, I don’t think I shall try to play the part of a Girton girl again.”

“Why not? It is good light comedy. But are you fond of playing parts?”

“I am a bad actress; but I try sometimes, because everybody does. Are n’t you playing one now? You have said some very nice things to me. But you did n’t mean them a bit. Now, did you?”

“I have meant every word I said,” he replied with energy.

“Do you really think me very charming?”

“Kitty, you are absolutely charming! May I

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call you Kitty? It would mean so much to me."

"You say it very nicely," the girl murmured softly, touched by his tender tones. "Well, I don't know. I will deliberate." The line came into Savile's mind, — he had often proved its truth, — "The woman who deliberates is lost." Somehow he did not like the quotation. But he had gone too far not to go farther. So he continued, —

"I want to say a great deal more. But it is too soon — I might make you angry. Or you would not believe me. But will you let me talk to you again quietly like this? You see that our atmospheres are perfectly sympathetic, and I —" He stopped abruptly, for, in turning a corner of the path, they had come face to face with the Duke and Lady Mary.

"Well, you two look very grave, and not at all as if you were enjoying yourselves," laughed Lady Mary, with a quick glance at her niece and Savile.

"We were having quite a serious talk, were n't we, Miss Karsdale, about atmospheres and affinities and other abstruse subjects."

"Yes, we were quite serious." And Kitty's brown eyes flashed a glance into Philip's that made his heart beat quickly in spite of himself.

"Now," said the Duke, "I have come for our tête-a-tête!" and he sat down by Kitty.

"Well, how have you got on?" Lady Mary asked in a low voice, as they moved away. "She looks as if you had made an impression on her. I have seldom seen her so serious."

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"I feel an awful cad, Mary. Love-making and money-making are a hateful combination. What a bright little girl she is! — an incarnation of spring. She laughs as the birds sing."

"She is very well. But you had better keep those pretty phrases for her. She is not the sort of girl you would ever fall in love with. Neither do I believe that she will ever fall in love with you, although I think she will be glad enough to have you. The *Morning Post* puts this sort of thing into a nutshell. 'A marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Sir Philip Savile and Miss Karsdale.' And a very good arrangement it will be. You will be saved from absolute ruin. She will have a splendid position in society. She will go her way, and you will go — ours!" And she turned her beautiful eyes towards him; but in vain, for he was walking moodily along, intent on the ground.

He looked up at the sound of a footstep, and Williamson stood before him. The gloom left his face and was succeeded by a smile as he saw his friend. The doctor gave a quick, judicial glance at Lady Mary.

"C'est Venus entière à sa proie attachée," he murmured to himself as he took in the situation, and realised the power of her voluptuous beauty. Shaking hands with her, he said to Savile, "I've been down to the White Lodge to see a patient, and I thought I would just look in upon Mrs. Tremeneere on my way back. So I told my coachman to take this route. Of course I had no notion she had a party."

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"And, like old Lambro, you are

" 'more astonished than delighted
To find so much good company invited,' "

laughed Lady Mary. She knew her *Don Juan* well, and relished parts of it much.

"One must be always delighted to find you, Lady Mary," his appreciating glance paying a more direct tribute to her beauty than his words. "And there comes someone else I particularly want to see."

The Duke approached with Kitty, and at the same time Mrs. Tremeneere, who had been made aware of Williamson's arrival, hurried up.

"How kind of you to come!" she said with manifest pleasure. "I *am* so glad to see you."

"So am I," added the Duke, warmly shaking hands with him, and introducing him to Miss Karsdale, on whom his keen eyes fell with interest.

"I happened to be near, so I could not resist the pleasure of just looking in on the chance of seeing you, Mrs. Tremeneere. How lovely your garden looks! And here is Miss Liddell, looking lovely too!"

Lilian blushed with pleasure at seeing him.

"What a treat!" she said. "I wish you would come oftener."

"I wish I could," he replied simply. "Few places are so congenial to me. But I have only two minutes, for I must be at a consultation in half an hour. And one of those two minutes I want to devote to the Duke. May I, Mrs.

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Tremenheere? There is a good deed to be done, and I naturally thought of his Grace."

The two men stepped aside, and returned after the briefest talk, the Duke saying,—

"I quite understand, Williamson, and am greatly obliged to you for letting me help. Put me down, please, for two hundred."

"Really, one would do, Duke," he replied.

"No; let it be two, please. I sha'n't miss the other, and it may make all the difference to them."

"Very many thanks," the doctor said. "And now, Mrs. Tremeneere, I must apologise for this unceremonious visit, and must go."

"You must go, I suppose," she sighed, "but you must not apologise. Lilian and I will go with you as far as your carriage, so that we may see as much of you as we can."

CHAPTER XII

"**W**ELL, little lady, how are you enjoying your day in the country?" the Duke said as he walked with Kitty along the narrow path.

"Oh, awfully! I loved the drive on the coach, and this is a beautiful place, and—and Sir Philip has been so—amusing."

"Yes, he is very good company!" And the Duke glanced at his companion, wondering if Savile had made an impression on that childish

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nature. And then he sighed, for he knew more than he cared to know of Philip's life, and thought the girl's chance of happiness as Lady Savile was not worth much.

"Has he shown you the golden pheasant and the monkey?"

"No, we forgot all about them, we were so busy talking. But I should like to see them very much."

"Then come this way," and they turned into a side path. "There he is! Is n't he a fine fellow?"

"Oh, how lovely! I do wish I were a golden pheasant!"

"Why?" laughed the Duke.

"Because I should always have on the most beautiful dress in the world without the trouble of going to a dressmaker. Perfect colouring and a perfect fit! What more could any girl want?"

"A good many other thing, perhaps. This bird probably has some aspirations, — to gain his freedom, for instance."

"Perhaps he has. And then he has such a dowdy old wife. I daresay he is rather ashamed of her. Do you know, Duke," she added after a pause, "that although you are awfully good to me and I like you extremely, you always make me feel rather ashamed of myself?"

"How is that?" he said half gaily, half gravely. "Surely you are not afraid of *me*?"

"Afraid? No. I say to you what I never could say to anyone else. No one is so really nice to me as you are. You never lecture me.

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But somehow —" and she hesitated — "I think you would like me to be different. Have I any aspirations? Do you know, I never do anything but amuse myself."

"Well, in London, it is, perhaps, natural at your age. But in the country don't you do anything else?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes I take a basin of soup to an old woman, and spill half of it on the way. And then I have to superintend a school treat, and play with the children; and they are all over jam, and it is dreadful! But I feel so good afterwards! I think one is better in the country; I feel very wicked in London."

"I am sure you could not be wicked if you tried," the Duke said, looking with a smile at the bright childish face.

"Oh, yes, I can! I like to make people flirt with me, even when I don't care for them a bit. I had such fun with Sir John Linton last night. I saw Lady Linton was getting perfectly furious, and I quite enjoyed it."

"Was that quite nice of you?"

"No, it was n't," Kitty said frankly.

"Then why did you do it?" he asked with a smile.

"Well, I'll tell you," the girl said. "I felt rather provoked. Sir John Linton is a great deal too much married. He and Lady Linton go about Darby-and-Joaning it quite outrageously. So I thought I would try to improve him a bit. You see, I had a good motive, Duke," she added with a mischievous look at him.

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"Do you really like this kind of joking?" he replied with just the slightest accent of reproach.

"Not if I think about it; but then, you see, I don't. Aunt Mary's house is not the sort of place to think much in."

"No, it is n't," said the Duke.

There was a little pause. Then he added, —

"You seem to be making the most of your first season."

"I am making up for lost time you know. I was such a dear little innocent when I came here three months ago; I might have been one of the Babes in the Wood,—we have such lovely woods at Holmhurst. Only I was n't quite lost in the wood. Aunt Mary found me and brought me here."

She looked up, and saw that the Duke was listening to her prattle with an expression of rather compassionate interest in his face.

"I wonder what you really think of me," she said.

"I will tell you, my dear child. I think of you as a wild flower, suddenly transplanted from your native woods to a hot-house."

The girl turned her frank, brown eyes on him, looking grave, and was about to speak again, when Lady Mary and Mr. O'Flaherty came up.

"I've just been telling Mr. O'Flaherty," she said to the Duke, "how clever you think his paper."

"I feel flattered by your Grace's encomium. My paper is a success. It is written faster, printed faster, and distributed faster than any other paper

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in London. It represents, I flatter myself, the greatest progress yet achieved in journalism."

"That, no doubt, is why you have adopted *Progress* as its title. *Progress, price one farthing*. I suppose haste is a token of progress?"

"What else would it be, your Grace?"

"Well, certainly you are in touch with the times. People always seem in a hurry. A man wrote to me the other day to excuse himself from attending the funeral of an old friend. 'I am so busy that I should not have time to attend my own funeral,' he said. But what is the goal to which we are hastening, Mr. O'Flaherty?"

"If your Grace inquires of me, I should say there can't be a doubt about that. It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

"Happiness has always struck me as a question begging word. What is happiness? And how is one to measure it? So far as I can judge — pardon me if I'm wrong — the object of some of the clever gentlemen who write in your paper seems to be to make people discontented. Is that the way to make them happy?"

"There's no other way of making them so. You see, if persons are contented, they don't progress. They remain where they are. They stagnate."

"No doubt that is so. But I wonder whether the greatest happiness of the greatest number is promoted by making them wish for things they can never attain. There is more luxury in all classes than there was a century ago — much more. And one effect of that is, that artificial wants are

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multiplied. It appears to be the function of certain able writers in the newspapers and elsewhere — advanced thinkers they are called — to aggravate those wants. If I don't bore you, Mr. O'Flaherty, I will tell you of a recent small experience of mine which just occurs to me."

"I'd be very much delighted to hear your Grace's experience."

"It is merely this. I was staying the other day in Paris with a friend who was going to drive me somewhere. When we had got into the brougham — it was a rainy night — I remarked that the coachman looked very sulky, and inquired if there was any special reason for the man's ill humour. My friend replied, 'It is very simple. He was a good-natured, merry fellow when he came to me, two years ago; but of late he has become a diligent reader of an advanced journal, "La Révolution Sociale," — you may generally see it sticking out of his pocket, — which has spoilt his temper. He is persuaded that he and I ought to change places, — that is what social revolution means for him, — that I ought to be on the box and he inside the carriage.'"

"Your Grace has a very telling way of putting things," said O'Flaherty, laughing. "I should be greatly flattered if you would furnish me with a few contributions for my journal."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. O'Flaherty. Well, if hereafter the dreams of my French friend's coachman are realised, and I find myself landless and moneyless, and desiring to be put into one of the newspaper offices that I may eat

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a piece of bread, I hope you will take me on your staff."

"But, joking apart, I feel sure that you sympathise with our aim,—to elevate the material condition of the masses."

"I am wholly in sympathy with it. But I am a little doubtful about some of the measures most in favour with the gentlemen who call themselves Progressives. They seem to me to be conceived, not in the interests of the masses, but in the interests of those who lead them."

"After all, is not the labourer worthy of his hire?" said O'Flaherty. "We must n't expect pure disinterestedness among men."

"We don't often get it," the Duke replied.

"Nor among women either," Lady Mary added.

"And yet," O'Flaherty rejoined, "if I may be permitted to say so, your Grace is an example of it in the management of your property."

"I look upon myself as a trustee, and a very liberally paid one. Besides, there is a supreme satisfaction in doing the best one can with the land, or money, or power one has. But let me say how powerful and how fair some recent articles in your paper on Irish questions seem to me. If you won't think that I am taking a liberty in making the observation, teaching my teacher, I would remark that the great thing is to bring out the *facts* of Irish rural history: for example, the extortionate rents and the unconscionable oppressions which were the by-word of Europe. Mill [Kitty pricked up her ears at the name] has

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fully described them, though with a Malthusian bias. But for one who reads Mill, there are thousands who read your paper. And, as things now are, those thousands are our masters, though they have n't yet realised their power. I was particularly struck by some remarks in your issue of yesterday about the abundant crop of oats at famine time."

"I am indeed gratified," the journalist replied. "I wrote that series of articles myself."

"I'm much obliged to you for telling me that. Well, Mr. O'Flaherty, I shall be delighted if you will come down to Bracy Castle some day, and ride about with me, and see how we endeavour to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number — or rather, the general happiness — in that part of the world. But you must let me make one condition," he added with a smile.

"I accept the invitation with the greatest pleasure," the journalist replied; and his face corroborated his words.

"With the condition? Blindly?"

"I have full confidence in your Grace."

"Well, it is only this: you must please come to see, and not to write, as a friend, and not as a journalist."

"Certainly, it is a very great compliment!" O'Flaherty answered, though evidently a little disappointed at the loss of anticipated copy. "Your Grace is one of those who 'do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.'"

"You are right," said the Duke, merrily, "about the blushing. As for the 'good,' don't raise your

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expectations too high. But I am delighted to find that besides a devotion to the greatest happiness of the greatest number, we have in common a devotion to Pope. He is, as I think, the book of life, — the best of moralists and among the best of poets.”

Here a servant made his appearance with a telegram addressed to Patrick O’Flaherty, M.P.

“Will you pardon me, Lady Mary?” he said, opening it. “Ah, the Payment of Members Bill; a division expected. I must say good-bye to Mrs. Tremenhoe and go.”

“Are you very keen about the bill?” asked the Duke.

“I detest it. But I shall have to vote for it. It is a plank in the party platform, and a horribly rotten one, I think. But I must respond to the crack of the whip — or they’ll lay it on. However, no harm will be done. The Lords are quite sure to throw the bill out. Few of us would vote for it, unless we knew that. I take it to be the business of the House of Lords to do what ought to be done, when the Commons haven’t the pluck to do it.”

“But, Mr. O’Flaherty,” interposed Kitty, with astonishment in her great brown eyes, — much to her own surprise she had been listening to the conversation with interest, — “How *can* you vote for a measure you don’t approve of?”

“My dear young lady,” he replied, “there is no merit in voting for a measure you approve of. The merit is in voting for a measure you disapprove of, in order to serve your party.”

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Kitty looked at the Duke with a puzzled air. "Miss Karsdale and I," the Duke laughed, "find that saying hard to be understood. We shall look out for a series of articles in your paper on political ethics. It would be an excellent subject for one of your ex-School Board Masters, or Lady Wranglers from Girton. But we mustn't keep you, Mr. O'Flaherty. Go and save your country — I mean your seat."

O'Flaherty went off laughing to take leave of Mrs. Tremenheere, Lady Mary accompanying him. She always made a point of being very civil to newspaper people. And O'Flaherty was proprietor and editor, not only of the farthing Radical newspaper *Progress*, which served her husband's purposes, but also of the sixpenny weekly *Society Snapshots*, which served her own occasionally.

"I've had a most delightful talk," he said to her. "The Duke is affability itself. But he is a most dangerous person. Like the old Marquis de Mirabeau, he has the terrible gift of familiarity — though no one would be familiar with *him*. I understand now why nearly all our people desert us, when they go to the House of Lords."

"You must not succumb to my cousin's fascinations when you are made a peer," Lady Mary said with a pleasant laugh.

"More unlikely people have been made peers, Lady Mary," he replied in the same tone. "But here is Mrs. Tremenheere. Good-bye, Mrs. Tremenheere, and thank you for a most delight-

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ful afternoon. If I ever can be of service to you, command me."

"What did he mean by that?" she thought, and was about to ask Lady Mary, when the Duke and Kitty came up.

"You were very gracious to Mr. O'Flaherty, Henry," Lady Mary said, well pleased with her cousin.

"I don't think he is half a bad sort," the Duke replied; "and he is as sharp as a needle. I rather like the man. Well —" to Savile, who has just joined them, "I suppose it is time to start. I rather want to get down to the House of Commons to hear Temperley, who, I'm told, is to make a great speech in support of the Payment of Members Bill."

"When I was in the House, he made a great speech against it," said Savile. "He has changed his principles."

"Not so," replied the Duke; "he never had any."

"Let us start soon, Henry," said Lady Mary. "I have a lot of things on this evening, and I want a rest before I dress for dinner."

"Shall I tell the grooms to hurry up?" Savile asked, and proceeded on his errand.

"You might take Kitty on the box seat, Henry," Lady Mary suggested. "She will like it."

"Oh, I should!" said Kitty. "How kind of you to think of it, Aunt Mary!"

The Duke assented cheerfully to the arrangement, with a mental reservation as to Kitty's

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explanation of it. And they went to get ready to start.

"I have not had a word with you all day," Savile said to Lilian as they were departing. "But I am coming down again soon, and then we will sit under the trees and talk our heads off."

"You must arrange a day with auntie ; she is seized with such a gay fit lately that she is always wanting to go up to London," Lilian replied quietly. The afternoon had been a bitter disappointment to her ; but she strove to look brightly up into Savile's face.

"All right, but it must be very soon, for I have a lot to say to you." And he thought how remiss he had been about Kleist.

CHAPTER XIII

THE sun was shining as it seldom does in England on the lawn of The Cedars. Luncheon was just over. Mrs. Tremenheere was seated at an open window of her drawing-room enjoying the scent and sight of her flowers, and Lilian was writing a letter in a deep embrasure at the other end of the room, when the door opened and the servant announced, "Lady Dewsbury and Lady Linton."

"I am so glad to see you both," said Mrs. Tremenheere. "May I offer you some lunch-

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eon? We have only just left the table. I am old-fashioned enough to lunch at one."

"No, indeed, thank you, dear Mrs Tremeneere," replied Lady Dewsbury; "we are going on to your neighbours, the Courtneys, who are my cousins. One must lunch with one's relations occasionally. It is such a bore, and I made Maud come with me out of charity. So we are both exercising one of the cardinal virtues to-day; and as we wished to reward ourselves for being so good, we have looked in on you first for a minute."

"I am so pleased to see you and Lady Linton; but another day you must sacrifice yourselves again, and come to luncheon with me. I should like you to see my flowers, of which I am very proud. I am half expecting my nephew, Philip Savile, but he has not come."

"What a charming man he is! Quite one of the smartest men in London!" said Lady Linton.

Lilian, who was quite invisible from the embrasure, was on the point of stepping into the garden, but stopped abruptly on hearing Philip's name.

"I have been a little anxious about him lately," Lady Dewsbury remarked. "That unfortunate business about Mrs. Northam, you know. I like him so much — *quand même*." And Lady Dewsbury glanced complacently at herself in a large mirror, and then admired her neat feet, shod in morocco shoes with large buckles and Louis Quinze heels.

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"All women like Sir Philip Savile," Lady Linton laughed.

Lilian's heart beat quickly. Who and what was Mrs. Northam? She had never heard of her before. Should she stay and hear more? No, she felt ashamed of her eavesdropping, and went quietly out through a little French window in the embrasure.

"It distresses me very much to hear these reports about Philip," Mrs. Tremeneere said. "I do wish those wicked women would let him alone."

"Dear Mrs. Tremeneere," Lady Dewsbury replied laughing, "it takes two to make love, just as it does to make a quarrel. If Sir Philip would only let the wicked women alone, it would be all right. But I can set your mind at rest about Mrs. Northam's business. I have it from the best authority that Mr. Northam's lawyers have advised him not to go into court; his own hands are so far from immaculate!"

"I heard the other day that Sir Philip is seriously thinking of reforming and getting married," broke in Lady Linton, thinking it too bad of her friend to discourse in this way to his devoted aunt.

"Really? I have heard nothing about it; and I think, if it were true, Philip would have told me," Mrs. Tremeneere said anxiously.

"Well, I was told that he is very much taken with Kitty Karsdale, Mr. Silverton's niece. You know that she is absurdly rich, — quite ridiculously so. They say she has already half a million, and will have as much more by and by."

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"Kitty Karsdale!" said Mrs. Tremeneheere. "A pretty, bright little thing; but I hardly know her."

"I think she is a little forward," observed Lady Dewsbury, in whom "the candid friend" is perfectly realised.

"I should be forward if I were so rich. I do so hate taking a back seat," murmured Lady Linton.

"Poor Philip wants money badly; and really a marriage with Kitty Karsdale might be a good thing for him," Mrs. Tremeneheere mused aloud; and her rather shrill voice struck on Lilian's ear, who was crossing the lawn at the moment.

"I should think it *would* be a good marriage! It is a long time since anything so good has been in the matrimonial market," exclaimed Lady Dewsbury.

"If only she is a really nice girl!" Mrs. Tremeneheere said anxiously, and was about to pour forth a string of questions respecting Miss Karsdale, when the Baron von Kleist was announced.

The young man had made a firm resolution to banish himself from the pretty house at Wimbledon till he had learned that his cousin had paved the way for him. But what is a man's resolve worth when a woman is in question? A kind little note from Mrs. Tremeneheere, in Lilian's handwriting, had asked him to come down and see them again. And so the next day he made his appearance in Mrs. Tremeneheere's drawing-room.

He advanced to meet the three ladies, who greeted him warmly.

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"Ah, dear Baron, you have come just at the right moment!" exclaimed Lady Dewsbury, who always conceived herself to be an object of hopeless passion to the young men of her acquaintance. "We are discussing your cousin Sir Philip's possible marriage. Can you throw any light upon it?"

"No, indeed; I have heard nothing. Who is the lady?"

"Miss Kitty Karsdale, — a charming girl with heaps of money. Surely you have met her?"

"I don't think so. I have been rather unwell lately, and have been nowhere. Besides, I go more to the British Museum than into drawing-rooms, as a rule. However, you will soon be able to ask Philip himself, for he promised to follow me down as soon as possible."

"Oh, dear, what a pity we can't stay! We shall be dreadfully late at the Courtneys as it is! Good-bye, dear Mrs. Tremenhoe, so glad to have had a few minutes' talk. We shall be delighted to come to luncheon if you ask us. Only would you give us a week's notice, as we have a good many things on?" And so the Baron escorted them to their carriage.

As soon as they had driven off, Savile appeared on his new purchase, Sunlight.

"Well, Adolf, old man," he said, catching sight of the Baron's retreating figure, "here I am, as I promised."

"Thanks," said Kleist, "I will walk across the common to see Wegner; I shall be back in a couple of hours."

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"Oh, my dear boy!" Mrs. Tremenheere, exclaimed as Savile entered her drawing-room from the lawn, through the door by which Lilian had made her escape, "I am so glad you have come. It is ages since you and I have had a quiet talk."

"Yes, I know. The London season is something detestable. One is hurried from pillar to post, from one round of idiotic so-called gaiety to another; and all the while one is bored to death! Now this is really nice, like our old times together. I have just met Kleist outside; he is still looking awfully chippy. He knows I want to have a talk with you; so he said he would walk across the common and call on some old German savant, and return here later to tea. I told him you would not mind."

"No, that is a very good arrangement, as I shall have you all to myself. I *am* glad that you have come at last! Sit down in that chair close to my side, and tell me all your news. Will you have any luncheon?"

"No, thanks. I breakfasted at midday in the French style. Then I rode quietly down — that is, as quietly as I could persuade Sunlight to go. She will be all the happier for a gallop in Richmond Park. I am going to take Lilian out for that long promised ride, you know. Saunders is bringing down another horse for her."

"I am glad that you have remembered that promise, Philip. She has been riding the horse you sent for her. What are you going to put her on to-day?"

"Oh, a much better one, — Eureka."

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"What, that skittish beast?"

"He won't be skittish with me," laughed Lilian, who had entered the room.

"No," said Savile, "Lilian has capital hands, a firm seat, and any amount of pluck. Don't be anxious about her, you dear old aunt. And now, Lilian, go and put on your habit, and leave us to talk about you and your very unsatisfactory doings."

"You won't want much time," she said, "to talk on so commonplace a subject, so I will dress quickly and be down in a few minutes."

"I know what a woman's 'few minutes' means!" laughed Philip. "It means that you and I will have a comfortable half hour's talk before she makes her appearance. 'A commonplace subject,' indeed! I wonder if she realises what a lovely girl she is? And I have never quite been able to understand what put that whim of turning governess into her little head."

"Well, you see, she is of a very independent nature. With no fortune and no relations, she felt she ought to be doing something for herself. You know I tried my very best to keep her with me. But I thought I ought not to oppose her too much. I can make no provision for her. My jointure is all I have; I am accustomed to live quite up to my income; and I can't change my habits, at my time of life. Besides," added the old lady after a pause, "in spite of all her efforts to conceal it, I think she was rather unhappy."

"Unhappy! My dear old aunt, how could

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anyone be unhappy here? I think the happiest hours of my life are those I spend with you."

"I have always given you, Philip, the love I would have given my children if I had had any. Even the dreadful stories about you which, somehow or other, find their way to me, don't seem to make any difference. I'm afraid I like you much better than I ought."

"Dear aunt," he said, taking the kind old hand affectionately, "I feel I can't be the entirely bad lot I sometimes think myself, if you have such an affection for me. But we were talking of Lilian. I wish I could do something for her. But I am awfully hard up myself. I don't get half my rents from the Dorrington property. I can't squeeze those poor devils of tenants of mine in times like these. What did you mean, though, when you said Lilian seemed unhappy?"

"Well, I could not help seeing how, at times, when she was not making an effort, she was preoccupied and pensive. Sometimes I used to think she was trying to subdue an unrequited or hopeless attachment."

"Strange!" said Savile. "However, I wish she would marry. Marriage is her proper career. And, by the way, I have a proposal for her."

"A proposal for her!" said Mrs. Tremeneere, greatly excited. "Who is it?"

"Adolf von Kleist. He has begged me to find out if she cares for him. I assure you, I don't like the job. But the offer is really such a good one that I suppose I ought to urge it upon her."

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"Adolf! It would indeed be a splendid match for a girl without a penny; and he is such a good fellow. But I don't fancy she cares in the least for him; and Lilian is not a girl to marry a man she does not love. Do you know, Philip, I am rather disappointed. I thought you were going to say it was the Duke of Shropshire. His keen eyes have seen her real worth, and he has paid her a great deal of attention."

"The Duke would never have asked another man to pave the way for him. He would have gone straight to the point himself. He always does. But poor old Adolf is so awfully in love, and so very humble about his own merits; and he seems afraid to put his happiness to the test."

"He is a dear good fellow, and so clever! But I am very much afraid that Lilian is certain to refuse him. I must say I think he is foolish not to plead his own cause. A woman always rather despises a man who is afraid of her."

"Yes, I think that is so. But fancy *your* knowing that, my dear aunt! However, I promised to do my best for him. So I must say what I can during our ride. I should have thought that being Baroness von Kleist would be infinitely preferable to being governess to Lady Betty Phillips!"

"Poor child, yes! But she is not like other girls. She is singularly unworldly."

"Well, it is an odd rôle, making love as proxy!" laughed Philip. "I don't know how I shall get on."

"And now," said Mrs. Tremenheere, "I want

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to ask you something about yourself. You must not be angry with your old aunt and think her impertinent; will you, dear?"

For answer, Philip rose and kissed her cheek, and then, sitting down again, said affectionately,

"Nothing you could say to me could be impertinent, so ask me anything you like."

"Well, dear, that gossip woman, Lady Dewsbury, who has just been here, told me that you intend marrying Miss Kitty Karsdale. Is that true?"

"I have thought of it, if she will have me. You know, I am in a desperate hole, and a rich wife is my only chance. But, all the same, I hate myself for playing a girl such a caddish trick."

"That is strong language. Looking at it as the world looks, you would give her, in return for her fortune, an extremely good position. As your wife, the girl would take a leading place in society, which probably she wants to do."

"Yes, I suppose that counts for something in the matrimonial market. But all the same, it seems hard on a girl, — even a society girl, which she, by the way, is n't, — if her husband does n't care for her. As for myself, I sometimes think I could be happy with a woman without a penny, if only —"

He stopped abruptly, for Lilian entered the room ready for her ride.

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CHAPTER XIV

OUT in the fresh air, side by side, with the cool west wind fanning their faces — that wind ever new, yet old with the age of untold æons — Philip Savile and Lilian Liddell rode for some time in silence; he wondering how he should approach the subject of Adolf von Kleist's desires, she hoping that he would speak of himself and give her his confidence.

At last the silence became unbearable, and, turning her flower like face towards him, she said, —

"You seem very deep in thought. Is there anything on your mind? And is it too serious to tell a girl like me?"

"On the contrary, I am longing to tell you, but I don't know quite how to begin. And don't say 'a girl like me,'" he added, — he did n't quite know why, — "because there is no girl like you." He paused. Then, as she did not speak, he continued, —

"The fact is, I want to ask you something very particular, only I am afraid you might be annoyed with me." He had fallen, without knowing it, into a soft and caressing tone.

"I annoyed with you! How could I be, when you are always so good to me?" she said, looking astonished, as, indeed, she was.

"I am not good to anyone—or for anything," he said with a sigh of irritation. He was angry

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with himself for not having put into action a single one of the excellent resolutions he had made at Dieppe. "But I really want to do *you* some good, Lilian. I hate this governing of yours! It is absolutely unnecessary. There is my aunt dying to have you always with her. She is quite lonely at times; and you know how she loves you. Don't you think it is absurd that you should allow your pride to stand between you and her wish that her home should be yours? Now tell me honestly, are you really happy in being governess to Lady Betty Phillips's wretched little kid?"

"She is not a wretched little kid! she is a dear little thing, and very fond of me," the girl said gently.

"I am not particularly surprised at that. But how does Lady Betty treat you?"

"Most kindly, and so does Mr. Phillips. I am like a daughter of the house at Spalton Rectory. I have nothing to complain of. And I am really happy in thinking that I am doing something to earn my own living. When I first understood that you and dear Mrs. Tremeneere were keeping me, and had given me such a good education entirely out of charity, and that I had not a farthing in the world, I knew that I should never be content till I could do something for myself."

"It is really too absurd to talk of charity, as I have told you a hundred times, Lilian, when you first started this ridiculous project," he said irritably. "My aunt loves you, and there can be

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no question of charity where there is love. As for me, your father saved my life at the risk of his own, to say nothing of my other obligations to him. And I should be a brute if I did n't do anything I could for his daughter. You were such a dear little girl when I first knew you. You used to throw your arms round my neck and kiss me, and do everything I told you! And now you won't listen to a word I say!"

A crimson blush spread over Lilian's face. She leant over and patted her horse's neck, to hide it from her companion. But he saw it, and could n't repress a wish that she had not given up her childish habits. How beautiful she was! And what a lucky fellow Adolf would be if she cared for him and consented to marry him. And then Savile experienced a sharp pang of jealous annoyance. Making love as proxy certainly was n't amusing. Why should he plead another man's cause? If he were successful, he himself would lose the first place in the friendship and affection of this sweet and lovely girl. But he had given his word to his cousin, and he could not break it.

"Don't you think you are a little unkind to say that I won't listen to you?" Lilian said as she recovered from her embarrassment. "I am listening to you now. I have always obeyed you except in this one thing. And in that ought I not to use my own judgment and to do what I think right? I am no longer a child, you know."

"No, you are a very lovely girl, and I suppose

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you think now that it is my turn to obey you," he said with a smile. And as he leant forward and looked into her eyes, Lilian blushed again. He had never spoken to her or looked at her in this way before. But how glad she was that he thought her lovely! To please him had always been her ideal of happiness. And yet, before that ride was over, he might tell her that he was going to marry Kitty Karsdale! Her heart beat painfully at the thought. But she *would* not think of it. No; she would enjoy this ride to the full. Perhaps it would be the last they would ever have together. So, with an effort, she smiled and said lightly, "No, indeed! I hate a man obeying a woman, except—"

"Except when he loves her? Is that what you were going to say?" again bending forward to look at her.

"No; except when she is right and he is in the wrong. Now, what is it that you were going to ask me? Only, for the hundredth time, that I will give up this governing as you call it?"

"No, something quite different. But I can't talk to you about it on horseback. You keep turning away your face, and I can't see what you are thinking of. Suppose we dismount for a time, and go and sit on that little bank under those trees which look so delightfully cool, and leave Saunders to look after the horses?"

"Yes, if you like. There, you see how obedient I am when you are reasonable!"

They cantered up to the clump of trees, and Lilian slipped lightly to the ground.

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"Why didn't you let me take you off your horse? And you let Saunders mount you!" Savile said with sudden irritation.

"How strangely touchy!" was the girl's thought.

"What a damned fool I was to promise Kleist to do this for him!" was his. Every moment the task that lay before him seemed to grow more distasteful.

"Oh, I always jump off myself; and you were talking to auntie, so Saunders put me up," she answered with affected carelessness, as the groom came and took charge of the two horses. He led them off to another clump of trees in the shade, and was soon walking them up and down out of sight.

"Now come and sit down here," Savile said, looking admiringly at Lilian's tall, graceful figure.

She sat down with her back against a tree. He threw himself on the grass at her feet.

"May I light a cigarette?" he said. "I hardly know how to begin what I have to say to you."

"Of course you may!" and she wondered at some subtle difference in his manner from what it used to be.

"Lilian," he began abruptly, "do you ever think of getting married?"

She started slightly, and looked at him nervously.

"Not often, but sometimes, of course," she replied with her habitual truthfulness. "I sup-

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pose all girls do occasionally. But why do you ask? Is *that* the difficult thing you wanted to say to me?"

"Part of it. Give me your hand, Lilian, as you used when you were a little girl, and sat close nestling to me, and told me all about your dolls and their names; and then you would generally ask me to tell you a story."

She gave him her hand without a word. He gently stripped it of the riding glove, and held it in his own.

"Shall I tell you a story now?"

"Yes, if it is an interesting one."

"Then it must be about love. There is nothing else in the world so interesting, Lilian," and he looked keenly at her.

"There are many other interesting things in the world," she laughed uneasily. Her heart was beating violently. What was he going to tell her? His own love story, with Kitty Karsdale for the heroine? She could not bear it. And yet she must, if he chose to tell her.

"Well, then, I will tell you a love story. Once upon a time — do you remember crying once, because I did not begin, 'Once upon a time'? And you said it would not be a proper story. You beat me and said I was unkind."

"What a horrid little girl I must have been! But go on with your story."

"Once upon a time, a young man — a very nice young man, good-looking, highly cultivated, well connected, and extremely rich — fell in love with a beautiful girl. And the poor fellow was

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so dreadfully shy that he begged his great friend to — to tell her for him."

"How stupid he must have been? And a coward too!"

"No; he is clever and very brave. But he is afraid of a beautiful pair of blue eyes, and a beautiful little proud mouth, and masses of yellow hair. Such things will make the cleverest head dull and the bravest heart faint."

He felt the little hand which he held closely in his own tremble.

"What is this story you are telling me? What do you mean by it? Do tell me?" she said nervously.

"Don't you know that you are very beautiful, and that men fall very quickly in love with you?" he asked, with his eyes fixed on her face, watching the soft colour as it flooded her cheeks.

"What nonsense! Nobody has ever been in love with me!"

"What about Borthop? Don't you remember how much attention he paid you at the Hinckley ball last Christmas?"

"Oh! that wretched little prig."

"And so did Lord Sempringham!"

"Why, he is married already!"

"Ah, so he is! I forgot that. No wonder, for he seldom remembers it himself! Well, there is someone else, Lilian, — the nice young man of my story, clever, rich, noble."

"Tell me who it is."

"He has asked me to plead his cause with you, and as I am your guardian, in a way, I

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promised I would. I think I ought to tell you that it is a very desirable marriage for you."

"Won't you tell me his name?" she asked in a hard, cold voice. She felt that the strain was too great.

"It is my cousin, Adolf von Kleist," and he looked keenly at her as he spoke.

"He does me a great honour."

There was silence for a moment. Her heart was beating too wildly for her to say more. So it was for this that Philip had come down to ride with her! To urge her to marry another man! And, as in a sudden flash of lightning, her soul lay bare before her. She loved Philip with a love that filled her whole being. And he gave her in return the careless affection that a man might bestow upon a child. The pain of the revelation was too sharp. The hot tears rushed to her eyes.

"Lilian, you are crying! Good Heavens, don't do that! I can't bear it!"

And in a moment his arm was round her, and he had kissed her white eyelids. Then he quickly released her, and said awkwardly: "Forgive me; but I always kissed away your tears when you were a little girl. You are not angry, are you?" For she had given a slight shiver, and had drawn away from him.

"No, I am not angry." The kiss had been exquisite pleasure, and oh, what exquisite pain! But it had been given in kindness. And was he not going to marry Kitty Karsdale? Why should she be angry?

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"Lilian, tell me, do you care for Kleist?" and he held his breath as he waited for her answer.

"He is very nice, is n't he?"

"Yes, or I should not have pleaded his cause. This morning I thought it an admirable marriage for you, but now —" He stopped abruptly, and held his words in check.

"But now — what?" she asked coldly.

"Now I think you should only marry a man you love. Lilian, do you love him?" and again he waited breathlessly for her answer.

"Don't you think," she said in a low, constrained voice, "that is a question which *he* only has the right to put?"

Savile muttered something under his breath. He felt furious indignation against Kleist, against himself, against the position that had been thrust upon him.

"You are quite right. I beg your pardon. But tell me this one thing. What do you think of love? Have you only a child's idea of it? Or a woman's conception of all that it means?"

Ah, why did he torture her in that way! Would their conversation never come to an end? What did she think of love? She would tell him simply. Her power of endurance was almost exhausted; she could not fence with the question.

"I think it means that someone else is more than life, success, or happiness apart from him! I think the love I dream of would make

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the whole world beautiful, like the sun ; it would be light and warmth and colour — and hope."

Her voice was low and soft, as if she were speaking to herself. It thrilled Savile as he listened. Again there was silence. Lilian looked with unseeing eyes at the landscape. Savile absently flicked his boots with his riding-whip. Then he spoke again in hard metallic tones, —

"My mission is accomplished. Will you see Adolf on our return, and give him his answer? I conclude from your manner that it will be a favourable one," he added with strange bitterness.

"Yes, I will give him his answer," she said wearily. "I am so tired. Let us go."

"And you will remember that I have done my duty by Kleist," he went on in the same bitter tones ; "I have told you that he is clever, and a good fellow, that he is in a very high position in his own country, that he is extremely rich, that he can give a woman her heart's desire, clothes from Paris and diamonds to fill her friends with envy, — everything, in fact !" and he gave a harsh laugh.

"Do you call that everything? Is that your opinion of me? Do you think these things are my heart's desire?" she said indignantly. And there was a flash in the blue eyes, and the beautiful mouth quivered.

"No, forgive me ! I did not mean it. You are all that is sweet and good and unworldly. To win your love would be heaven !"

He stopped abruptly, and rose quickly to his feet. His passionate tone had brought the blood

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back to her face, which had grown so pale, and the tears into her eyes once more. He was seized with a mad longing to draw her again into his arms and cover her face with kisses. He made a great effort of self-command. His honour and his loyalty to his cousin came to his assistance. And Lilian herself, was she not his charge? Was he not bound to protect her, even from himself? Yes, most of all from himself. She loved Kleist, — he was sure of it, or she would have answered his question. And Kleist was such a fine fellow. She would be safe in his hands. He was conscious of a strange, dull sense of misery which he could not stop to analyse at the moment; for Lilian had also risen and was saying, "Don't you think we really ought to go back? It must be getting late, and auntie will be expecting us."

"Certainly!"

He called to the groom to bring the horses, and they rode away in almost total silence.

CHAPTER XV

"**A**H, my dear children! I am so glad you have returned," Mrs. Tremenheere cried, as Lilian and Philip rode up to the hall door. "Poor Adolf has come back from his visit to that musty old German servant, and seems quite depressed. He is in the drawing-room playing such dreadfully melancholy music. Do go in

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and cheer him up, Philip. And, Lilian dear, make haste and take off your habit, and come down to tea."

"Yes, auntie, I won't be long!" and Lilian flew up the stairs, only too thankful to seek the shelter of her own room.

Savile went to the drawing-room, where the pathetic strains of Tristram's "Adieu to Isolde" fell on his ear. Kleist sprang up as his cousin entered the room.

"Well, Philip, well?" he asked eagerly, as Savile flung himself into an easy-chair.

"My good fellow, don't be in such a damned hurry! I'm confoundedly hot and infernally thirsty. I can't speak till I've had a drink."

Kleist's blue eyes opened in astonishment. He had never heard such irritable words from his cousin in his life. He saw that Savile was decidedly cross. His own temper was admirable. So he waited in silence, in spite of his nervous anxiety.

The servant had brought in a tray, and Savile had drained a large tumbler of whisky and soda. He put down the glass and drew a deep breath; then, when the servant had left the room, he said, —

"Dear old man, I'm afraid I snapped like a cur. Forgive me; I'm ashamed of myself. But it's so hot, and that little vixen Sunlight pulled like the devil, and — and I'm out of sorts. But that's no reason why I should have been so beastly uncivil. Of course you want to know the result of my endeavours on your behalf.

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Well, I did my best, praised you up and all that sort of thing; not as much as you deserve, I know, but as much as I could. I got no decided answer. All the same I think it looks hopeful. And now you must do the rest for yourself."

"You think it looks hopeful?" and Kleist's voice trembled.

"Yes — I've just told you so," Philip answered shortly. He could not subdue his irritation, hard as he tried.

"Ah, my dear fellow, I can't thank you enough! How good you have been to me! You are a true friend! You have been always more like a brother to me than a cousin."

"Adolf, you are the best fellow in the world; and — and I wish you luck. Now I am going out to have a smoke. She will be down here directly, and you must plead your own cause."

He went quickly through the window, and disappeared among the trees.

Kleist sat down and tried to recollect all the things that he meant to say to Lilian. He had so often gone through the scene in imagination! But now he forgot everything. He trembled lest his nerve should forsake him, and this golden opportunity be lost for ever. Every footstep made his heart beat fast, and caused the colour to come and go on his bronzed cheeks.

"I am a fool — a cowardly fool!" he said to himself; "but I love — and love is madness!"

The door opened. He drew a long breath as Lilian entered the room. She had on a pale yellow muslin, soft and diaphanous, that made

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her look unusually beautiful ; and the emotions of the last few hours had brought an unwonted colour to her cheeks.

He bowed low before her in silence, and she, seeing his embarrassment, came to his assistance.

"I am so glad you managed to come down to-day, Baron. Mrs. Tremeneere was saying that we had seen nothing of you lately. I heard you had been ill. Are you better?"

"Thank you, yes, I am quite well."

He had taken up a book in his nervousness, and Lilian noticed that it was an English translation of *Faust*.

"Have you been laughing at our poor attempts to render Goethe into English? I never read translations if I can help it."

"Ah! I know you are a good German scholar. You have told me that you like our language and our literature," he said eagerly.

"Indeed I do! I perfectly delight in Heine's songs and Schiller's plays. The great Goethe wrote for men rather than women, I think. *Faust*, of course, one knows almost by heart."

"And the German people? You like them too?" he asked with the same febrile eagerness.

"Yes, all those I know ; but I have not met many Germans. I was only once in Germany, when I stayed with Mrs. Tremeneere at Wiesbaden, and I remember that I liked the German servants so much, — they had such kind, honest faces."

"The German face, Miss Liddell, reflects the German heart. You have read *Faust*, and you

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remember, do you not, the scene where Gretchen pulls off the leaves from the Sternblume — aster flower, I think you call it — one after another?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly," answered Lilian, beginning to grow nervous, as the Baron was recovering self-possession.

"As I walked along this morning, I was pulling a rose to pieces — 'She loves me — she loves me not.' But I had not the courage to go to the end. It meant to me too much: my fate, my happiness, all that life holds dear. Lilian, I love you, I worship you; I lay myself at your feet, to do with me as you will! Ah, give me one little hope — one little word of kindness!"

He stood before her, unusually tall, with his sinewy, well-knit frame slightly bent, his blue eyes full of beseeching tenderness, his fair hair waving over his forehead, and his light moustache brushed up over a well-cut mouth, — truly an ideal of manly devotion.

Lilian looked up at him, and wondered why she felt no answering thrill, but only a deep distress that she should have to give him pain.

"Oh, I am so sorry you have spoken like this! I like you so much, so much; and you are so good to care for me, but —"

"Ah, you do not love me! But I have hurried you — I will wait for months — years. A love so great as mine will surely win love in return. Do not send me away. I will be patient; and some day you will come to me, unworthy as I am."

"Indeed, I cannot give you any hope! I

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hate saying it, but I know I can never love you as you deserve to be loved!" and the tears stood in her eyes.

"I only ask for time. I will serve seven years for you. You are English, and the English are cold, they say. But surely you will not turn away from such deep undying love as mine? I will devote my life to making you happy. I will be your slave. You shall have no wish ungratified. Ah, Lilian, have pity on me!" And he took her hand in his.

For a moment Lilian wavered. What a fine fellow he was! And how he loved her! How strong he looked! Yes; and how handsome! And she was so lonely. The man she loved knew nothing of her heart; she was to him only the little child he had befriended.

She sat, her hand in his, as all this flashed through her mind. Then she thought she felt Savile's kiss burning on her eyelids. She drew away her hand, rose, and said gently: "I am so very, very sorry, but—but I can never marry you. It is quite, quite impossible. Please don't say any more. It would be false and cruel in me to let you."

"Ah, you love someone else?" he cried passionately.

The crimson colour rushed to her face. She said indignantly, "You have no right to ask that!"

"Surely my great love gives me a right to ask it; for then I should know, indeed, that my fate is sealed. Lilian, won't you tell me?"

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She remained silent. Their eyes met, and she turned away.

"Your eyes have answered me. It is all over—I will ask you no more. God grant you may be happy!" And once again he took her hand, bent low and kissed it gently.

Lilian's heart ached for him. Tears were standing in his eyes and in hers too. His voice was broken as he went on, —

"If ever I can serve you in any way, you will let me, won't you? Give me that promise to take away — give me that one consolation!"

"I promise," and she gave him her hand.

He kissed it reverently. "You have been gentle and kind to me," he said, "and I thank you for it."

Her heart was too full. She pressed his hand to her lips; and before he quite realised what she had done, she was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

LILIAN sat in her bedroom for a time, motionless, looking out on the beauty of the summer day, with her eyes turned inward.

"Oh, how I wish I could have married him!" she said to herself. "How kind and good he is! And how handsome he looked!"

Had she done wrong in refusing him? Surely she had thrown away the substance for the shadow, — for a mad day-dream that could never

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be realised! Philip was fond of her as the child of the old tutor who had saved his life. That kiss which still burned on her eyelids was given only from kindly sympathy. He was very poor; he must marry a girl with money. She had not ventured to ask him if he intended to marry Kitty Karsdale. But the idea was evidently in his mind as the only course open to him. She was nothing to him. He was all the world to her. How foolish she had been to give her whole heart to a man who could never be to her anything but the kind friend of her childhood! And yet to suffer for love contained a bitter sweetness till now unknown to her. It was not of her own free choice that she loved him. She loved him because she could not help it. And what was before her? To go on loving and loving—in vain. That was the life that awaited her. And she might have been the adored wife of Adolf von Kleist. But she could not have married him with her whole heart given to Philip? Her pure nature revolted against such a prostitution of herself, though veiled by the name of marriage. Her head was beginning to ache with the tumult of her thoughts, when a message was brought that Mrs. Tremeneere would like to see her.

With a sigh Lilian rose and went.

Meanwhile Adolf von Kleist had rushed into the garden, and, in the sharp pain he was suffering, had gone blindly down a small path under the trees, when he came suddenly upon Savile, who was seated on a bench smoking a cigarette.

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Philip looked up as his cousin approached, and, after a glance at his face, made room for him on the seat and handed him cigarettes without a word.

Kleist, with trembling fingers, took one. For some minutes the two men smoked in silence. At length Philip spoke,—

“Dear old Adolf!” he said in his low, tender tones, “I need not ask what has happened. I am most awfully sorry!” and he pressed the other man’s hand.

“Yes, it is all over—my dream of love and happiness. She does not love me. Why should she?”

“I thought she cared for you; indeed I did! But one never knows. Did she give you no reason?”

“None, except that she could never be my wife. But I know the reason—she loves someone else. Whoever he is, I hope he will be worthy of her—and make her happy. He deserves to be shot, if he does n’t; and I should have much pleasure in shooting him.”

“Are you sure? Did she say so?” Philip asked in surprise.

“Not exactly. But I—I forgot myself, and asked her. She said I had no right to ask, and of course I had n’t! But I read the answer in her eyes. She did not deny it. Love *has* eyes, though he is painted blind.”

“Poor old chap! I’m awfully sorry for you—yes, and for her too; you would have made her happy. What are you going to do

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now? Had n't you better go away and get a change?"

"Yes; but I must stay for this hateful ball at Shropshire House, for I promised Lady Helena to help her with the cotillon, and then I shall go to Germany. I don't think that I shall come back to England — at least, not for a long time. And I don't think that I shall ever marry. A man who has lost his all at a single throw, is in no hurry to take up a makeshift."

"No, I suppose not; but — well, one never knows! I think —" and Philip's voice took a grave tone, as if what he said came from the centre of his heart — "I think that a love so intense and absorbing as yours is, after all, a great thing for a man, however it may end. Yes, I do, even if that love is unreturned. But that is cold comfort to you." Then, speaking in an everyday tone, "I wonder what you will do in Germany when you get back? Will you devote yourself to your book? — or will you go in for hunting the wild boar and reading Heine?"

Kleist gave a sad little laugh.

"I shall go home to Göttelstein, and most likely do both the things you suggest, particularly hunting the wild boar. The book must stand over for a bit. I don't feel in the humour to start on it again at present. The boar hunt excites me, and Heine soothes me, and I feel I want both excitement and soothing just now. Then, in the winter, I think I shall travel for a time, and go to some out-of-the-way places."

"Yes, that's a good plan. But send me a

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wire sometimes, old fellow, if you are not too far from civilisation, to let me know how you get on."

"I will. You're a good friend to me, Philip, and I know you have done your best to help me. It has been a pretty severe blow; but I pray she may be happy with the man she loves. And you, Philip, you have seemed a bit dissatisfied lately. May I say to you, don't go and make a mess of things; don't barter your heart for rubbish; for you have a heart, and too good a one to fritter away. Take your life in your hands, and do something with it. Now I'm off. Will you make my excuses to Mrs. Tremeneere? I don't feel as if I could face her just now."

Kleist rose; his face was very pale, and the moisture still stood in his eyes. He grasped his cousin's hand warmly, and then strode quickly out of sight.

"Poor old fellow! he is hard hit!" Savile said to himself. "I wonder why she refused such a brilliant offer? A fine, manly fellow, too, and such an awfully good sort! Who the devil is she in love with? It must be someone she has met at the Phillips'. I grudge her to anyone but Adolf!" And he frowned and thrust his hands into his pockets. Then his thoughts turned to his cousin's last words. His two greatest friends had said much the same thing to him; and after all his resolutions made to the sound of the waves at Dieppe, he had returned to London and had gone back into his

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old groove. He had fallen again without a struggle under the sway of Lady Mary. She had absorbed well nigh every moment of his time. When he was not in attendance upon her, he was obeying her orders, and paying marked attention to Kitty Karsdale. And to-day, it had been by considerable *finesse*, and at some cost of truth, that he had succeeded in obtaining his liberty to spend a few hours with his aunt and Lilian, whom he had neglected so much of late.

Here, in this quiet house, so far from, and yet so near to the noise of London, the scales seemed to have fallen from his eyes. He saw himself in the toils of a woman who still appealed, indeed, to his senses, but whom he knew he no longer loved. He knew also that there was something in him — what was it? — which made him revolt from the idea of a loveless marriage with a mercenary motive. He must, he would shake off his trammels, and act a man's part. He would not be forced into this marriage with Kitty Karsdale. But it would be hard work to gain his freedom. If only he could meet a girl whom he could love with his whole heart and soul, and who would give him her pure love in return, — a girl like Lilian — good and true, and yet a clever and charming companion! And then his thoughts turned upon their ride together, and he recalled every incident of their conversation under the trees. His heart beat quickly as he remembered how he had clasped her with his arm, for a moment, and had kissed her eyelids.

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Then he cursed himself for his want of self-command, and wondered what had possessed him. What had she thought of him? Was she angry with him? If she were in love with another man, she might have resented that kiss. She had scarcely spoken during their ride home. But she was too good and pure to think evil of a kiss given to comfort her, when her beautiful eyes were clouded with tears, poor child! How lovely she was, and how different to all the girls he knew. Child! no she was no longer a child; she was a woman; and this had come upon him as a revelation. Up to now she had been to him the little girl who loved and trusted him as her guardian. He would give her no cause to distrust him. He would look on her as a sacred charge. If she were indeed in love with someone she had met, — probably in the country, — he would do his best to bring about her happiness. What a blind fool he had been! Perhaps once she might have learnt to love *him*. The childish affection might have developed into a deeper feeling. It was all too late. How could he offer the ashes of his love, which had already been consumed in a hundred farthing rushlights, to a young girl, the very embodiment of that nobleness and purity and truth which Williamson had talked of, — a girl who deserved a man's whole heart? And then his debts! Those cursed debts which meant ruin!

He rose impatiently, tired with a self-communing which was as gall and wormwood, and

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walked back to the house, and into the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Tremenheere at her writing-table.

"My dear boy, I have been hunting for you everywhere! Here is a letter from the Duke of Shropshire, asking Lilian and me to stay a few days at Bracy Castle. And here is a letter for you from him, asking you to come too. He tells me he sent it to your chambers, and the servant said you had come down here; so one of his grooms has brought the two letters, and is waiting for the answers. You will accept, won't you? I shall enjoy the visit so much more if you are there."

The kind old eyes rested lovingly on him as he stood looking at, but not seeing, the red "S" with the ducal coronet above it, and wondering what he ought to do. He realised in a sudden flash that he longed to be under the same roof with Lilian, to find opportunities of being alone with her. There he would be his own master, away from Lady Mary and endless scenes and recriminations, away from Kitty Karsdale, with the temptation to gain her fortune for himself at the cost of his honour—yes, that was the true way of putting it—and her happiness. He had so much to say to Lilian, so much to ask her. And there they would be free to ride and walk together in the woods or on the downs. The visit might be fraught with suffering for himself. He would risk that. Suffering? Well, he was not a coward to shrink from pain. And the tempta-

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tion to be with Lilian was too great. He would accept.

"Well, dear boy, can you manage it?" his aunt asked, watching him anxiously as he stood lost in his own thoughts.

"Yes, I will come; and we will have a good time together," and he stooped and kissed her.

"Oh, how delightful! I *am* glad! Now answer the Duke's letter. Here are your own pens and paper, which I always keep ready for you."

And Mrs. Tremeneere sent off the acceptance in triumph, with her own.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY MARY was lying in bed, sipping her chocolate. She had been very late the night before, and she was tired. But she was more than tired; she was restless and worried. She had sought to distract herself with a volume of Richard O'Monroy's short stories, and had been laughing over the life philosophy of Madame Manchabelle and the trials of the Baron Samuel. But she soon grew tired of the volume, and fell to thinking about her own life philosophy and her own trials. Her eyes were fixed upon an exquisite miniature of Philip Savile which lay open on a table by her bedside. How she loved him! And how he had once loved her! Now — she felt convinced of it from a hundred

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little signs — her power over him was waning. She wondered if any other woman was taking her place. If so, she would make it nasty for that woman. Her career since she came out at seventeen had been a long triumph. And she had crowned it by attaching one of the handsomest and smartest and cleverest men in London to her chariot wheels. No man before had really touched her heart, though some — well, many — had taken her fancy; no one, she felt sure of that. Her husband had never interested her. It had been a marriage of convenience with a millionaire. He had paid her debts, and had made magnificent settlements. She had brought to him her beauty and her title; she had given him an alliance with some of the greatest families in England — and two children. After the birth of the second, they had drifted apart, and had amused themselves, by tacit consent, in their own ways. But Philip Savile had come to be something more than an amusement. He was a part, the best part, of her life; and keep him she would. He should marry Kitty's money, just as she had married Silverton's; and the marriage should be merely a fresh link between him and herself.

Thus meditating, she rose, and, wrapping a dressing-gown around her, went into the next room, which was her own sitting-room. As she passed a long mirror on her way, and caught sight of her "imperial moulded form" and victorious beauty, she paused and smiled complacently. She felt — and with good reason — that

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though she had passed the fatal age of thirty, she was still one of the most fascinating women in London. She rang for her maid.

"See if there are any letters for me."

The maid returned with a packet. She glanced at the envelopes, and a slight frown crossed her brow. Philip's handwriting was absent. Then she opened a letter from Lady Helena. It said that the Duke had suddenly decided on leaving London for a few days, so they must ask her to postpone dining with them on the morrow, as had been arranged. Then in a postscript, "Would you care to come to the Castle for a day or two and bring your niece?"

Lady Mary sat for a moment deep in thought, and then turned to her maid.

"I see that this letter from Shropshire House has come by hand, and that the servant is to wait for an answer. Tell him that I will send one later, and order the Victoria to be round in half an hour, and then come back and dress me."

In less than an hour Lady Mary was on her way to Savile's chambers. The morning was still young, and, knowing his habits so well, she was surprised to hear that he was out.

"I will go in and write him a line." And the valet admitted her without hesitation.

She had been anxious to find out, before accepting her own invitation, if Philip also had been invited to Bracy Castle, and she intended writing a peremptory note telling him to call on her at once. She sat down at his writing table,

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and her eyes fell upon an opened letter in the Duke's handwriting, dated two days before, which she did not hesitate to read. She was right in her surmise. He had been invited. Had he accepted? He had not consulted her about it, as he would have done two months, even one month ago; he had not even mentioned it. A hard line came into her face; she rose suddenly, from the writing-table, and rang the bell.

"I don't think I will trouble to write to Sir Philip," she said when the servant made his appearance. "I will leave you a message instead. I want to know if he will dine with us the day after to-morrow."

"Perhaps I had better inform your ladyship that Sir Philip intends leaving town that very day, on a visit to his Grace the Duke of Shropshire."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, my lady, for Sir Philip told me yesterday to go to the boot-makers' about his new riding boots, and that they were to send them at once as he should want them at Bracy Castle, where he was going the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, very well! And now I come to think of it, I believe Sir Philip *did* mention it to me; but I forgot all about it."

"Well, my lady, the news was broke to me quite sudden-like; I was not at all prepared for it in any way. I believe it was all arranged that day Sir Philip was at Wimbledon." And Leslie felt he was a person of importance for the moment.

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"Ah! very likely. Tell your master not to trouble to write; I am sure to see him somewhere or other to-night, and then we can arrange. And thank you, Leslie."

A sovereign glided from her gloved hand into the man-servant's. She found it wise policy to be good friends with Sir Philip's valet. So he had accepted the invitation! And he had not let her know. "Arranged that day Sir Philip was at Wimbledon." She saw it all. The Duke — what could make him take up such people? — had asked Mrs. Tremenheere and the nursery governess there. And Philip would be running after that girl with the cold, proud, pale face, while she was eating out her heart for him.

"How I hate her!" she said to herself. "Well, forewarned is forearmed. And my instincts are generally right."

She drove at once to Shropshire House, and accepted Lady Helena's invitation by writing a few words on her visiting card. Then she went on to Madame Desirées, and ordered two new dresses.

As soon as she reached home, she sent for Kitty.

"We are going down to Bracy Castle the day after to-morrow," she said. "What clothes will you take?" And from the clothes, quite as a secondary thought, she led the talk on to Savile, and told the girl she felt sure that he was very much in love with her and would shortly propose.

Kitty laughed a little, and blushed a little, and swished her fashionable clinging skirts about

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the room, but said nothing; so that Lady Mary wondered, and felt half inclined to shake her for taking such an announcement with so much calm. If only — if only things had been different! If she had been in Kitty's place, young, rich, and unmarried, and had heard this news, what would her feelings have been! But what was the use of letting her imagination run on the impossible? Kitty's fortune must be Philip's; Kitty must bear his name; Kitty must bear his children. That would be enough for that giggling little doll with her baby face. Enough — and too much! His love? No; that should remain with herself. There would have to be a smart marriage which would amuse Kitty, and which Philip would hate. Then a very short honeymoon, a week spent in some dull country house; and how Philip would be bored! And with what joy would he return to her society, to her arms! She did not shrink, or hesitate, or blush when she planned this scheme — or rather, went over it, for she had thought it out long ago. She only smiled; and the smile was full of content, as, strong in the knowledge of her power over her lover, she saw her plan succeeding.

"What are you smiling at, Aunt Mary?" Kitty asked.

"At the idea of your marriage, dear." She made a point of always speaking the truth, when she possibly could. It saved trouble and was safer.

"But I — I am not sure, even if — But we won't talk of it, will we? I am very young. There is no need to hurry, except to get these

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new country dresses you say I must have. There *is* a hurry for that, for dressmakers are so busy just now."

"There *is* a hurry about Philip Savile, too," said Lady Mary, with that calm, decided manner which always impressed the girl so much. "If you let him slip through your fingers, you won't get such a chance again, although you are so rich. He is not the sort of man to play fast and loose with. And now, dear, will you go to your own sitting-room, as I have a great deal to say to Perkins; and if you will come to me in half an hour, we will drive out."

So Kitty departed, pondering Lady Mary's few emphatic words about Philip Savile, which was what Lady Mary had intended. And the great deal which Lady Mary had to say to Perkins, the butler, remained unsaid, for she did not send for him at all. She sat musing. How would Philip take it when he heard she was going to Bracy Castle? Would the glad light she knew so well come into his eyes? Surely he could not really care for that pale girl who was certainly good-looking, but not a bit voluptuous. No; he only had a quixotic feeling about her, because her father had saved his life; and his frequent visits to Wimbledon were only caused by his absurd devotion to his tiresome old aunt. There really could be no cause for fear in that quarter. And Lady Mary tried to dismiss Lilian from her mind, but could not. "Is my instinct right?" she thought. And the thought tortured her.

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Just then Savile was walking in the Park, deep in thought. He wondered if he had been wise to accept the Duke's invitation. He knew that he was possessed with an intense craving for Lilian's presence. But what was the use? She was evidently in love with some other man. She had said as much to Kleist. And he himself was compelled to marry a 'rich wife. He would only singe his own wings for the first time in his life! Well, why should n't he singe them if he liked? He had never denied himself the gratification of the moment. And no power on earth should deprive him of a few happy days alone with the girl who was occupying his every thought. He had stayed at Bracy Castle often, and he knew that perfect liberty was allowed to the guests, so that he would find no difficulty in securing Lilian for his companion in his walks and rides. Above all, he would be free from his bondage for nearly a week — away from the beautiful, imperious woman who claimed every moment of his time. He knew he was ungrateful. But how sick and weary he was of it all! He longed to breathe the purer atmosphere in which Lilian moved. Lady Mary would probably be extremely angry with him on his return. He would have to face a scene. But he should have had rest and peace for nearly a week. And something might turn up to release him from his bondage.

As he walked along lost in thought, a victoria suddenly drew up by his side, and Lady Helena beckoned to him to come and speak to her.

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"Oh, dear Sir Philip! I am so glad you are coming down to the Castle! I do hope you will have a good time; you must be giving up so many things in town! I really don't know who will be there, for Henry often asks people on the spur of the moment without telling me. But Sir Everard Bassett is coming; and there will be that dear aunt of yours, and that sweet girl, Miss Liddell; and Lady Mary has just left a card at the house to say she will be delighted to come with her niece, Miss Karsdale. So we shall be a nice party, anyhow. What did you say?"

For Savile, in his disappointment and annoyance, had muttered "Damn!" under his breath.

"Oh, nothing! It will be quite a charming party; it was so kind of you to ask me," he said, recovering his self-possession.

"Very well then, we shall expect to see you on Wednesday," and nodding and smiling, Lady Helena drove on, leaving Philip to continue his walk with bitter disappointment at his heart. His dream of a few happy days with Lilian had vanished. The old story would be repeated *ad nauseam*. Was he never to be free? And he turned out of the Park, and walked moodily to his chambers.

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CHAPTER XVIII

BRACY CASTLE is within two hours of London by express train. And the last Duke of Shropshire, when the Railway Company was originally negotiating with him for the passage of its line through his property, had stipulated for the insertion of a clause in the Act of Parliament providing that all trains must stop, if required to do so by signal, at his little station of Bracy. The present Duke largely profits by this judicious arrangement of his father's. He is extremely fond of the fine old place which has been the home of his race for seven centuries, and loves to see his park and gardens in their full summer glory. He takes the keenest interest in country pursuits and in county business. And during the London season he is half his time at the Castle, frequently running down in the morning, and returning in time for his social engagements in the evening. He loves, too, to make up an impromptu party for a few days' visit there.

To receive such a party, he and Lady Helena were now being whirled through the sweet morning air. The next train brought Lady Mary and Kitty, with Sir Everard Bassett, in time for luncheon. Mrs. Tremenheere and Lilian came later, and made their appearance at tea on one of the terraces. Mr. O'Flaherty was to reach the station at half-past five; and the Duke, who was desirous

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to show him as much attention as possible, had arranged to drive over and meet him, and to bring him by a route of some dozen miles, which would take him to a rebuilt village, and through some admirable woodland scenery that lay between it and the Castle. The remaining guests were the Bishop of the diocese, who had come on business to a neighbouring parish, from the Rectory of which a carriage was to fetch him at half-past six, and Sir Philip Savile, who was to be picked up by the same vehicle from the station at ten minutes to seven.

Bracy Castle was a vast old pile, exhibiting all varieties of architecture from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth. Every generation had added something — and had destroyed something. But, as its present owner is wont to say, it has escaped the worst kind of destruction which is called restoration. The Duke contemporary with George IV. had desire to emulate the exploits of that monarch at Windsor. And the ignorant charlatan, who converted himself from a real Wyatt into a spurious Wyatville — fit emblem of his architectural performances — had prepared designs for converting the home of the Bracys, rich with the spoils of time, into that poorest of all pretensions — early nineteenth century Gothic. But Providence intervened, through the instrumentality of La Signora Scaleschi, a charming *danseuse* who danced Duke Frederick out of his last guinea before the mischief was begun. She left her venerable adorer, in exchange for his money, an admirable portrait of her bewitching self, which

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hangs in the present Duke's own room with the inscription "The Saviour of Bracy Castle."

Duke Frederick's nephew and heir, profiting by his uncle's experience, rigidly eschewed the gambling-table and the turf, ballet-girls and architects, and carefully nursed the property, developing its new found mineral wealth. And when Duke Henry succeeded his father at the age of thirty-eight, he found himself one of the richest peers in England, with his ancestral home quite untouched by modern vandalism. A magnificent pile it is, flanked by towers, rising here and there into the quaintest gables: surrounded by its moat, now dry and filled with the brightest flowers: commanding, on one side, a view of the distant sea, beyond the undulating park, watered by the loveliest of trout streams, and adorned by spreading beeches, luxuriant oaks, mysterious seeming cedars: and, on the other, looking across magnificent woods on to lofty downs.

O'Flaherty, who was immensely gratified by the Duke's graciousness, burst into exclamations of unfeigned delight as they neared the Keep. "I was prepared for much," he said; "but this far surpasses my expectations. I have never seen anything so fine!"

The Duke, who loved the old place, was about to give his visitor some further explanations, when a carriage drove up from another direction. "Ah! there is the Bishop," he said, "and Savile too. I had forgotten they were to come together. You know Sir Philip, Mr. O'Flaherty. Do you know the Bishop?" On receiving a negative reply, he

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continued: "You must make his acquaintance now; he is a charming and accomplished man; and it is very desirable, in a small country house party, that everyone should know everyone as soon as possible. Let us get out."

He gave the reins to the groom, and they advanced to the brougham. Savile alighted, shaking hands with his host and the journalist. Then the Bishop descended, — a tall, spare figure, with keen, intellectual face and bright, kind eyes whose imperfect vision was aided by spectacles. The Duke greeted him cordially and introduced O'Flaherty, to whom the prelate said a few courteous words.

As they entered the castle, the dressing bell rang. A footman took the Bishop to his room. Another escorted O'Flaherty to his.

"Savile, you have your old quarters, I expect," the Duke said; "I will take you to them. It is on my way. No doubt you will find your man there."

As they mounted the stairs Savile asked, laughing, "Where is the Bishopess?"

"I really cannot tell you," the Duke replied. "It is enough for me that she is not here."

"Has she ever been here?"

"Yes; we asked them to pay us a visit when they first came into the county."

"Is she a horror?"

"She is the embodiment of all that I detest most in women: a prig of the worst type, which is the pragmatist; a prude of the worst type, which is the prurient."

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Savile was amused. "'T is n't often one can draw you, Duke ; but you appear to rise to Mrs. Chapman. She does not seem to have impressed you favourably on her first visit."

"Her first and her last. I begged that Helena would painlessly eliminate her from future house parties. We waylay her husband sometimes when he is in the neighbourhood, and secure him for a night or two. He is a very good sort."

"They say so. They say too that you got him the bishopric."

"Well, when the see fell vacant, I wrote to my cousin, who was then Prime Minister, suggesting Chapman. I knew him pretty well at Oxford, and liked him. He was a sterling good fellow and a ripe scholar. But beyond hearing him preach a few times at the Chapel Royal, I have hardly seen him since. His wife I had never seen till she came here."

"Of course one sees little of parsons in society, and less of their wives. I remember someone told me that Mrs. Chapman was a very pretty girl when the Bishop married her."

"She has still good looks," said the Duke : "the mellow and mottled charms of the British matron. In my opinion, Bishops should not have wives ; or, if they have, they ought to keep them at home, or to carry them about in chests like that old scoundrel Cranmer, the originator of episcopal matrimony. But this engrossing theme must not make us forgetful of the sliding hour. It is twenty minutes to eight : " and he retreated to his own room.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE Duke, who was punctilious about his duties as host, was in one of the smaller drawing-rooms at five minutes before eight with Lady Helena. Soon his guests appeared.

"Let us draw lots for our ladies," he said. "Helena, will you write the names, and we will put them in this vase."

It was soon done.

"Now let us draw. Bishop, will you begin?"

Kitty Karsdale fell to the Bishop's lot, and he was pleased; he knew a pretty girl when he saw one. The new Ambassador secured Lady Helena, and he was pleased; he had much to say to her about her brother. Savile drew Lady Mary, and she was pleased; it was something even to have her idol next her. To Mr. O'Flaherty the fates sent Mrs. Tremenhoe, and he was pleased; she could tell him all about everyone there.

"You are my prize, Miss Liddell," the Duke said, taking the remaining paper. It was quite evident from his look and tone that he was pleased, and from the way in which she took his arm, that she was.

The Duke's dinner-parties were always successful. And one secret of their success was that he never forced the conversation, though he always stimulated it. He liked it to become more or less general when the party was small enough, and he much preferred such a party. The tête-

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à-tête gradually became a quartette, until, by and by, some anecdote or *bon mot* was heard by the whole table. And so, at this dinner party on which my readers and I are just now peeping, some remarks of Sir Everard Bassett's were the point of departure from duets to a full chorus.

He was an admirable talker, and had been entertaining Lady Helena with an account of the oddities of the chairman of one of the newly elected Parish Councils in the part of Gloucestershire where his own property lay. The Duke, who was next but one to him, had caught one of his stories and was amused.

"That is very good, Bassett," he said.

"Oh," the Ambassador replied, "our chairman has done better than that. One of the best things he said was on his election. Someone who proposed him had expressed confidence that he would be impartial. 'No,' he said, 'on assuming the chair, I shall be neither partial nor impartial; I shall do my duty.'"

"Is n't that a bull, Mr. O'Flaherty?" said the Duke.

"It is, and a good bull too," the journalist replied. "But I can go one better. Last month I was in County Cork, and I was anxious for news of one of my contributors whom I had lost sight of. So I went to the house where I used to hear from him. 'Does Mr. Kelly live here?' I inquired. 'Shure he does!' the maid-servant replied, 'but he is dead.' I expressed regret, and enquired when he died. 'Well, sor,' the maid

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said, 'if he'd lived till to-morrow, he'd have been dead a fortnight.'"

"Yes," said the Bishop amid the general laughter, "that is a very good bull indeed. By the way, Mr. O'Flaherty, how would you define a bull?"

"I've never thought about it; but I believe I know a bull when I hear one."

"I really asked," said the Bishop, "for information. Last year I heard a lecture at the Royal Institution one evening on *The Theory of the Ludicrous*, and the lecturer — though with apologies for exercising himself in so difficult and subtle a matter — gave us this definition: 'A contradiction in terms which conveys a real meaning.'"

"I daresay that might stand," O'Flaherty said.

"You seem to share the lecturer's modesty," said Savile. "But in questions of this sort we always defer to Irishmen; and Mr. O'Flaherty, as we all know, is a great practical authority on them."

"I heard that lecture too," said Mrs. Tremeneere, "and I remember the lecturer saying that bulls were by no means an Irish monopoly. He spoke of an Austrian officer who observed to a guest staying in the same country house, 'Ah! you are fond of solitary walks, so am I; let us take a walk together!' and of a Scotchman who told a friend that a common acquaintance had declared him unworthy to black the boots of a certain person, and who in reply to the remark, 'Well, I hope you took my part,' said, 'Of

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course I did: I said you were quite worthy to black them!"

"So that the faculty of bulling is common to all mankind," said Savile.

"I don't think the Americans have it," O'Flaherty observed thoughtfully. "Their humour is very peculiar. I don't think they produce bulls."

"Anyhow, their amusing writers are certainly very amusing," the Duke remarked. "Artemus Ward, for example; and poor Lowell, — what a charming story-teller he was!"

"Yes," said Bassett, "there is something irresistibly funny about their fresh and homely grotesqueness."

"They *are* a most amusing people," said O'Flaherty. "I was in the United States last year for three months, and I think I never heard so many good stories in the same space of time. And then, the imperturbable coolness with which they tell them! One of the most amusing men I met there was a gentleman who told me that he had practised for some years as a burglar."

"His reminiscences must have been peculiar," observed the Ambassador.

"Some of them were very funny," assented O'Flaherty. "I remember one which particularly amused me. I had been complimenting him upon his coolness. 'Well, stranger,' he replied, 'I guess I'm a pretty cool hand, but I once met a cooler.'"

"Do let us have the story," said the Duke.

"With pleasure," O'Flaherty answered; "but

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I'm not sure I can reproduce his twang, though I'll do my best.

"“I think about the most curious man I ever met,” said the retired burglar, “I met in a house in Eastern Connecticut, and I should n't know him either if I should meet him again, unless I should hear him speak ; it was so dark where I met him that I never saw him at all. I had looked around the house downstairs, and actually had n't seen a thing worth carrying off, and it was n't a bad looking house on the outside, either. I got upstairs, and groped about a little, and finally turned into a room that was darker than Egypt. I had n't gone more than three steps in this room when I heard a man say, “Hello, there.”

““Hello,” says I.

““Who are you ?” said the man, “burglar ?”

““And I said yes, I did do something in that line occasionally.

““Miserable business to be in, ain't it ?” said the man. His voice came from a bed over in the corner of the room, and I knew he had n't even sat up.

““And I said, “Well, I dunno ; I've got to support my family someway.”

““Well, you've just wasted a night here,” said the man. “Did n't you see anything downstairs worth stealing ?”

““And I said no, I had n't.

““Well, there's less upstairs,” says the man, and then I heard him turn over and settle down to go to sleep again. I'd like to have gone over there and kicked him. But I did n't. It was

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getting late, and I thought, all things considered, that I might just as well let him have his sleep out.' ”

The story was listened to with general and hearty laughter, which was so contagious that the servants precipitately left the room. Its “fresh and homely grotesqueness,” heightened by O’Flaherty’s combination of Yankee twang and Irish brogue, was irresistible.

CHAPTER XX

“**W**ELL, Bishop,” said the Duke, when the ladies had gone, “I hope you were successful in your efforts as peacemaker this morning. There is a great row going on in a neighbouring parish,” he explained to the others, “between Ritualists and anti-Ritualists. It is one of my livings, and the man I put in there as Rector, some dozen years ago,—a good, quiet sort of man, I thought him,—has suddenly developed a taste for lights, incense, vestments, confessional boxes, and all that kind of thing. A few young ladies and middle-aged spinsters applaud. But the sturdy old farmers and their wives won’t stand it. So the Bishop has come to put things straight.”

“I tried my best,” said the prelate, “to make both sides hear reason; but with indifferent success, I fear.”

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"No wonder," observed Savile, "when reason has so little to do with the matter."

"You must often be reminded, Bishop," Bassett remarked, "of that saying of Clarendon's: 'Clergymen understand the least, and take the worst measure of human affairs, of all mankind that can write and read.'"

"Yes," said Savile, chiefly for the sake of saying something, for the conversation did not specially interest him; "these Ritualistic gentlemen, disputing about gewgaws in an age like the present, when the dynamite of science and criticism threaten the very foundations of their faith, remind me of Nero fiddling while Rome was burning."

The Bishop looked grave, and seemed to be meditating an answer. But the Duke, who thought the line which the conversation was taking might be embarrassing to him, interposed with ready tact, —

"I regret the good old days of Parson Jack Russell, who, by the way, first took me out cub-hunting when I was a very small boy. An excellent clergyman he was: read the service in a solemn, sonorous way; preached a very sensible sermon; was good to the poor, comforting to the sick and dying; a thorough gentleman and a fair scholar."

"Not only burnt his own smoke, but 'made mild illumination out of it, for the good of mankind in several particulars' — besides riding admirably to hounds," said O'Flaherty.

"I certainly should have had an easier time of

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it in those days," sighed the Bishop. "This evening, when I was dressing for dinner, a letter was brought me by an express messenger, from the parish next the Ritualist's. There, a very Broad Churchman is the Vicar, and a churchwarden, who, it appears, writes shorthand, took down the sermon which was preached on Ascension Day, and complains grievously of it. My correspondent promises me the full text to-morrow. Meanwhile he sends me, by way of specimen, the opening sentences," and the Bishop pulled a letter from his pocket.

"A thing may be poetically true and literally false. Such is the first lesson of this day's Feast. The story of the Ascension is the product of an age when men believed the earth to be a great flat plain, and heaven a country some fifty or sixty miles up in the sky. It is impossible for us, in these times of juster conceptions of the universe, to think of the Ascension as they did. A voyage on a cloud, to no intelligible goal, is not credible in days of ballooning,—a pursuit to which I am myself much addicted."

"Fancy a clergyman saying that!" O'Flaherty remarked. "A balloon is a more suitable place for him than a pulpit. He is no better than a heathen Chinee!"

"Is he a wag?" inquired Savile, with a smile.

"He is the gravest of men," replied the Bishop. "He does n't understand what a joke is."

"That clergyman is certainly peculiar," laughed the Duke, "which is the received account, I

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believe, of the heathen Chinese. But you are a Catholic, Mr. O'Flaherty, and this divine's way of dealing with the crude supernaturalism of former days does not commend itself to you."

"Well," said O'Flaherty, "I am not a pious man; but I was born a Catholic, bred a Catholic, and hope to die a Catholic. And if I were the Bishop — his lordship will pardon the supposition — I should just suspend that clergyman summarily, if I could."

"I can't," said the Bishop, smiling; "I have no such summary jurisdiction. But your point, Mr. O'Flaherty, is, I take it, that the clergy are not appointed to teach people to doubt."

O'Flaherty, who was at that time sipping some peculiarly fine Lafitte with great gusto, bowed assent.

"I think Parson Jack Russell's sermons — I remember some of them — were more practically useful," said Bassett. "What does the average man know of the philosophical treatment of legends, the various kinds and degrees of truth, the new conceptions of the universe which we owe to modern science, and the new conceptions of religions which we owe to modern criticism? And what would he be the better for knowing about them?"

"I think he knows more about them than you give him credit for," said Savile. "Doubt is as contagious as faith."

"And often as irrational," the Bishop quietly observed. "But, Mr. O'Flaherty, it has sometimes occurred to me that your clergy are more

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heavily weighted than ours by the difficulties to which Sir Everard has referred: the critical, scientific, and historical difficulties ascribed to modern thought, or, to give concrete instances, which is always helpful, the difficulties popularly associated with the names of Huxley, Renan, and" — he smiled — "my late Right Reverend brother, Colenso."

"Colenso," laughed the Duke, "was a great arithmetician, doubtless. But, unless my memory is at fault, Voltaire largely anticipated his criticisms."

"Most of our clergy, Bishop," replied O'Flaherty, "fortunately for themselves, have neither the training nor the leisure for investigating those things. They hear little of them in our seminaries; and to meet what little they do hear, they are supplied with time-honoured apologetics which, at the present day, would satisfy nobody outside a seminary. Of the small proportion of our priests who really face the problems your lordship has in view, some are able, in one way or another, to find solutions of them consistent with orthodoxy. Others are unable, and leave the fold for the wilderness."

"Well, but your educated laity?" asked Bassett.

"I think I would say that the great majority of our educated laity discount those difficulties, if I may so put it. For myself—" he added — "the Bishop says it is best to give concrete instances, and that must be my excuse for speaking about myself—for myself, I say that a religion

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good enough for St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Cardinal Newman, is good enough for me. And I know what I am talking of when I mention them ; I think I have read nearly every word they wrote. At one time I was an ecclesiastical student, and a very diligent student too."

"Dear me," said the Duke, "you interest me much. I had never heard of that part of your career."

"Yes," he laughed, "Saul was among the prophets once. In me the Church has lost an indifferent priest, and the world, I flatter myself, has gained a smart journalist. But"—in a more serious tone—"I take it that all our doctrines are mere adumbrations of truth ; they are, to use Newman's word, economical. As St. Thomas puts it, words represent things not as they are in themselves, but as they appear to us."

"That's a principle which would take one far," said Bassett.

"It seems to me," the Duke observed, "that any principle which is to be really helpful in this matter, must take us far—very far. The ideas of Christianity are eternally true. The symbols are mere phenomenal vestures of truth : some better, some worse ; all inadequate ; mere *Aberglaube*."

"It is a nicer word," Savile remarked with a smile, "than superstition, which Cicero, I remember, defines as empty fear of the gods : *vanus Deorum timor*."

"I think the principle stated by Mr. O'Flaherty a perfectly sound one," said the Bishop.

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"The difficulty is as to its application. By the way, Duke, you remember that striking epitaph which Newman wrote for himself, stating that on such a day he passed from types and shadows to the Truth — '*ex umbris et imaginibus ad Veritatem.*'"

"It is very fine, and very suggestive," replied the Duke. "What a great man he was! By far the greatest man the Church of Rome has had in this century, not to go farther back."

"Greater than Döllinger?" asked Bassett.

"Döllinger was a very learned man," said the Bishop, "far more widely learned than Newman. But he was a mere legalist and pedant. He had no eyes."

"Yes; that is just what strikes one about Newman," the Duke observed; "he saw so much — much more than he has distinctly said. In Newman there are hints and surmises and conjectures, so slight and evanescent in expression, and yet so startling, that I am tempted to call them esoteric. 'He that hath ears to hear.'"

"Most of Newman's Catholic readers have n't," the Bishop remarked.

"All the better for them, perhaps," rejoined O'Flaherty. "Not that I have anything to say against Newman; I subscribe to everything that has been said in his praise. I venerate him as a great teacher and a great Saint."

"So do I," said the Bishop. "I had the privilege of seeing him three times, about relatives of mine who had been led by his writings to think of joining the Church of Rome; and

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nothing could exceed his candour — except, perhaps, his sweetness. He eventually received them. I envy them the tranquillity they have found.”

O’Flaherty, quick-witted as he was, knew not what reply to make to this speech of the Bishop’s, which, somehow, seemed to be addressed specially to him.

The Duke observed: “Our conversation appears to furnish an illustration of the old saying that all roads lead to Rome. But, look, it is close upon eleven. Shall we go? The ladies must be thinking that we are never coming.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE Duke was wrong. The ladies were not in the least thinking that. When they had reached the yellow drawing-room, Lady Mary had taken Mrs. Tremenheere to show her some of its art treasures. She did not derive much enjoyment from the occupation. The old lady, though very refined and very cultivated, was not to her taste; but still, Philip Savile’s aunt was worth a certain amount of civility. Lady Helena had sat down between the two girls — like her brother, she delighted in the society of young people — and was eliciting from them how they had got on at dinner.

“Got on!” said Kitty. “Oh, beautifully! Who could help getting on with that dear de-

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lightful Bishop? I have never talked to a Bishop before except one — our own — who came to luncheon at Holmhurst the day I was confirmed. And he was so pompous and prosy! But this Bishop is quite different.”

“What did you talk about?” said Lady Helena, amused by the girl’s prattle.

“Oh, so many things! He can talk beautifully about anything. First, he admired the lace on my frock. He knows all about lace, — much more than I do, — and told me what it was, and such interesting things about the way in which lace is made. Then I happened to quote something in French. And he knew at once that I spoke it properly, and asked me where I had learnt it. And I told him that it was as easy to me as English, and all about the dear old convent at Fontainebleau where I was for three years, and how sweet the sisters were to me — one of them especially, Sœur Angélique; and how they never worried me about my religion. And he knows Sœur Angélique quite well, — a niece of his was a novice at the convent, — and he spoke so kindly about them all: he is n’t a bit bigoted. And then he told me about some nice French books which I might like to read: *La Petite Fadette* was one of them, and *Le Récit d’une Sœur* was another. And he promised to write me out a list of really nice French books, you know; not the horrid novels which — somebody —” and the girl glanced at Lady Mary — “always has about her. And then I told him how the Duke had advised me to make a point of getting

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a quiet hour a day to myself for really sensible reading, and how I had done it for the last six weeks, and how much good I felt it had done me. And he seemed quite pleased. And then — I don't know how it was we got on that subject — he told me some things about the poor in the big parish he had in London before he was made Bishop; and how good and unselfish many of them were; and about a sweet little child in a hospital who had died in his arms. And I could hardly keep my tears back. And I did feel that I should like to do some good in the world! And then, somehow, the conversation became general, and Mr. O'Flaherty told those stories, which certainly made me laugh. What a funny man he is! But I would rather have gone on with my tête-à-tête with my Bishop."

Lady Helena, who had come to like the frank, fresh girl immensely, looked much gratified.

"And now, Lilian," she said, — she had got to call her two young friends by their Christian names, — "we have heard Kitty's experiences. Will you tell us yours?"

"The Duke was most charming to me," said Lilian. "He told me about some unpublished letters of Schiller's, and of the curious way in which they came into his possession; and he promised to let me read them, and said I had better translate them, and write an article about them for one of the magazines. And then we talked about *Wallenstein*, of which he thinks as great things as I do. And he told me of the Bracy who served in the Thirty Years' War and

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wrote the MS. diary which is in the library here. And I am to read that too, and perhaps edit it. You will soon see me a full-blown authoress, Lady Helena," the girl laughed.

By this time Lady Mary and Mrs. Tremeneere had finished their little tour of inspection, and Lady Helena got up to find the most comfortable chair for her old friend. Then, turning to Lilian, she said: "Won't you sing to us? I know you sing delightfully."

"I will do anything you wish, dear Lady Helena. What shall I sing, auntie?"

"Sing some of those songs of Schumann's, and I will accompany you; else you cannot do your voice justice."

"No, you are too tired; you must rest."

"I'm not a bit tired, and accompanying is no trouble at all. Besides, the music chair looks exceedingly comfortable."

Mrs. Tremeneere sat down at the piano, and Lilian began a sweet low melody. The old lady was one of those rare accompanists who know that their work is—to accompany. And the chords, softly struck on the instrument, were merely as fringe on a garment, or flowers on a dinner-table, while Lilian's rich soprano notes flooded the room.

Lady Mary, who had no voice, and who professed to despise amateur musicians, was at first studiously inattentive, but soon listened, subdued in spite of herself.

Lilian sang song after song, and had just begun a fresh one when the men were quitting the

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dinner-table. As they were walking along the corridor, her voice fell on the Duke's ears. He turned to his guests, and put his finger on his lips to enjoin silence.

They entered noiselessly. Standing with her back to the door, and absorbed in her music, Lilian was unconscious of their presence.

When the song ended, there was a clapping of hands and a loud expression of delight, O'Flaherty, himself no mean vocalist, being specially enthusiastic.

Lilian flushed at her unexpected triumph; and the Duke, advancing to her, said: "You sing as well as you talk, Miss Liddell. May I ask for one more song? Unless you are too tired," he added, with his habitual courteous consideration.

"I am never tired of singing," she said gaily, "and I will sing another song with pleasure—unless," she added with a little laugh, "people are tired of listening. *You* have only just come in, you know!"

"No," returned Lady Helena, in the same tone. "You will get tired before we shall."

"But you, auntie?" turning to Mrs. Tremeneere.

"I'm not a bit tired; I love accompanying you," the pleased old lady protested.

"What shall I sing, Duke?" said Lilian.

He thought for a moment: "I wonder whether you know a certain *Ave Maria* of Schubert's which is a favourite of mine?"

"Is it this?" said Mrs. Tremeneere, playing a few bars.

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"Yes, that is it."

"It is a great favourite of mine, too," said Lilian.

The Duke listened with rapt attention as the sacred strains, so fraught with significance to him, were poured forth, slowly and reverently, from the girl's full throat.

"Thank you very much," he said quietly; and she noticed a curious look of mingled pleasure and pain on his face. "That must be our evening-hymn. My sister will soon be giving the signal for departure; we keep earlier hours here than in London. But before we go, we must make our plans for to-morrow. Are you prepared for a long ride, Mr. O'Flaherty? No doubt you are a good horseman; all Irishmen ride well."

"I could ride almost as soon as I could walk; and I am very fond of it — although I don't get much of it now," he added with a sigh.

"Then," said the Duke, "you must get as much as you can while you are here. I have a good deal to show you. Would eight o'clock be too soon for you to start? And shall you and I breakfast together at a quarter past seven?"

O'Flaherty gladly assented.

"Now, what would the rest like to do?" the Duke asked.

Lady Mary said she would not come down to breakfast, — which, indeed, she very seldom did, — but would spend a quiet morning in her rooms. Lady Helena proposed to devote her-

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self to Mrs. Tremenhoe. The others declared in favour of riding.

"That will be capital," the Duke said. "Savile, you know my stud pretty well. Will you arrange things? I shall ride Pilgrim, and shall give Mr. O'Flaherty, Black Prince. There are some dozen more saddle-horses in the stables — none of them bad, I think, but some better than others. Riding is one of your many accomplishments, Miss Liddell, I feel sure," he said, thinking how well the girl's lithe, slim figure would look in a habit.

"Sir Philip took great pains to teach me," she replied demurely.

"Great pleasure," he rejoined. "Lilian is an excellent horsewoman."

"So is Miss Karsdale," said the Duke. "I think Brilliant and Ariel will be the mounts for them."

Lady Mary tried not to look what she felt. She had been quite eclipsed by that pale nursery-governess the whole evening.

"And will you and Bassett choose your own mounts?" the Duke went on. "I would advise you to ride across the Downs to Henneker Point, where there is a magnificent view. Then bear to your left and get into the London Road, and keep to the right till you get to the Pailsham Lodge. It is about two miles, and very good soft ground by the side of the road all the way. Turn into the Park then, and ride back to the Castle. It will be about sixteen miles altogether, and grass all the way."

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So they separated for the night. The last thing Lilian, as was her wont, went to see Mrs. Tremenheere, who was already in bed.

"What a delightful evening we have had!" the old lady said. "What are you thinking about, Lilian?" as the girl made no reply.

"I was wondering," she answered, "how I could possibly have thought the Duke old."

Mrs. Tremenheere felt convinced that this lovely girl would be the future Duchess, and was soon dreaming of her favourite's brilliant future. Did the vision come to her through the ivory or the horn gate?

CHAPTER XXII

BREAKFAST is a very informal meal at Bracy Castle. It is served at any time anyone wishes, in the larger dining-room, where a number of small tables stand ready till noon. Or, if a guest so prefers, it is sent to his own rooms. Luncheon is ready at half-past one, and, upon this occasion, all the guests were punctual and hungry. The Duke and O'Flaherty had visited schools and hospitals, model cottages and co-operative associations, village clubs and old age retreats, and had ended their twenty-seven miles' ride by a hand gallop across the Park. The Irishman was full of all he had seen, and poured into the willing ear of Lady Helena, next whom he found himself at luncheon, a panegyric on his

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host, which was not the less sincere for being a trifle hyperbolic.

The Duke had been struck by the good sense and quick wit of the journalist, who "brought an eye for all he saw," and who even made, very deferentially, a few suggestions which seemed to his host well worth considering.

The party led by Savile had had a capital ride, in which Sir Everard Bassett had specially devoted himself to Lilian, while Kitty, who was in high spirits, amused herself by teasing Savile in a very whole-hearted manner. He had called her Kitty; and she had demurred.

"I never gave you leave, I only promised to think about it; and I have n't had time. I've been too busy."

"Well, don't trouble to think about it; give me leave now."

"Now! No: you look too like Mephistopheles. But don't cast your spells on *me*; if you want a Gretchen, Miss Liddell is much more like one than I am."

"I don't want a Gretchen; I want Kitty."

"Then you *must* want: *entbehren sollst du; immer sollst entbehren*. You did n't think I knew so much German! What jolly turf this is! — and there are miles and miles of it: let's get a gallop, that will be nicer than talking nonsense."

"Now," said the Duke, when luncheon was well-nigh over, "I've ordered the coach at three. Who will come? I am going to drive over to Hetherington Manor; it's a very picturesque old place, well worth seeing, with some exquisite Gains-

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boroughs, and some lovely ruins of a Benedictine Abbey. And I rather want a word with the German Ambassador, who is there on a brief visit. You'll come, Mary, won't you?"

Lady Mary would be delighted. And so would everyone else, it soon appeared, except the Bishop, who had to spend the afternoon confirming, some few miles off, and Mrs. Tremeneere, who preferred a quiet time in the gardens. Savile, who did n't in the least want to go, was casting about vainly for some excuse, when a *deus ex machina* came to his assistance in the shape of a footman with a telegram.

"My dear Duke," he said on reading it, "I fear I must ask you to excuse me; I must spend the afternoon over some business papers which have to be sent off by this evening's post."

Then Lady Helena remembered that she had some people to see after in the village. So the party for the coach was reduced to six.

But Savile did not address himself to his business papers. He took up *The Times*, lighted a cigarette, and established himself in a garden chair, in a shady spot commanding a full view of the castle.

The blazing sun threw great Italian-coloured shadows from the heavy battlements upon the grass, and from the trees upon the fine old pile. There was a great silence in the air, for the birds were resting from the heat, tired with a grand concert they had given in the early morning. The wide-open flowers, planted in the ancient moat, seemed exhausted too, and half dying for

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a little of the water that had once filled its grassy bed. It was a day seldom seen in England : a day of eastern sultriness and southern brightness ; a day that made the venerable place smile with a hundred little lights and shadows till it seemed to be young again, as when it rose from the hands of its builders long centuries ago, yet with an added beauty gained from the softening touch of Time.

Here Philip sat and thought. First, about his own position ; and the more he thought of that the less he liked it ; then of Lilian, who evidently had greatly fascinated the new Ambassador — and perhaps the Duke also ; and the more he thought of that too, the less he liked it. Either would be a most eligible *parti* for her. The Duke was the greatest match in England. Bassett, a two years widower with one little girl, was a man whom any woman might be proud to call her husband. Well, what could it matter to him ? But he was well aware that it did matter, somehow, and that it mattered very much.

“What a tangle it all is,” he thought ; “and what a blooming idiot I am — and always have been !”

And then he looked up, and saw his aunt coming towards him.

“Dear aunt,” he said, “are you tired of the gardens ?”

“No ; but it is really too hot to stay in them any longer. Have you finished your correspondence ? If so, will you take me round the reception-rooms ? They are full of lovely things, and I should like to look at them again quietly.”

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"By all means; come along. I will prove an admirable cicerone."

They wandered through the outer hall with its low vaulted roof, full of Japanese lacquer and china; and then through a more modern hall of white and black marble, with huge ferns standing in large Italian tazza-shaped vases, and great bouquets of crimson roses grouped in huge blue china jars; thence they passed into the long corridor, out of which open the principal sitting-rooms of the house. It is lined with admirable pictures, chiefly of the Venetian school, the collection of the sixth Duke, and with a large number of beautiful cabinets, specimens of the best work of every century being found at stated intervals along the wall. Bits of exquisite Sèvres china and small inlaid tables, disposed here and there, further tempted Mrs. Tremeneere, who was somewhat of a connoisseur, to linger. She felt it her duty, as it certainly was her pleasure, to give Savile her opinion of the richest and rarest things.

"Dear aunt," he said at last, "I want to have a bit of a chat with you, and Heaven knows when we shall see each other alone like this again. Nothing is more difficult than to make arrangements for a quiet tête-à-tête in a country-house. Everyone seems to get in your way. Shall we go into the late Duchess's boudoir? We are more likely to be undisturbed there than anywhere else. And as it commands a view of the drive, we shall know directly when the party comes back."

He led the way round to the right, into a room

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which spoke of the individual taste of one person. It was an octagon ; its walls of white wood carved with vine-leaves and grapes, in high relief, and in dead and bright gilding. The curtains were of pale blue brocade ; the old French carpet was of the same colour and of singular beauty. One end of the room opened on a conservatory where cunningly arranged mirrors multiplied, almost indefinitely, the palms and hanging baskets, so that you would imagine yourself in a vast garden ; while the delicate marble fountain was placed in such a position that it, alone, was not reflected. The furniture was gold with blue silk ; and the fine lace of the curtains was worth a king's ransom. There were exquisite Buhl cabinets full of old Dresden china. And admirable water-colours, framed, without margin, in dead gold, hung from the walls.

It was some minutes before Mrs. Tremeneere could tear herself away from the contemplation of these things, which reminded her vividly of the beautiful woman who had brought them together, the Duke's idolised mother. At last, however, she sank down in an easy-chair, and Savile taking another, she began in her most affectionate manner to question him as to what he wanted to talk to her about.

"Well, my dear aunt," he said, "I was in a brown study when you came up to me just now. I was reflecting what a hash I have made of my life. Do you know, I have a great mind to range myself and marry, and become a domestic character. You must have something to do with

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it, you fairy godmother. One breathes a wholesomer atmosphere in your presence."

"Ah, Philip," she said earnestly, "if I could only see you what I wish to see you, I should die happy. I don't want to die till then."

"I would do anything to please you, aunt,—anything I could. I had a sermon from Williamson a short time ago. And I can't get rid of the impression it made on me."

"He is quite the nicest friend of yours that I know. Somehow he reminds me very much of Lilian—I can't tell why. Do you see what I mean?"

"I don't know that I do. But it is quite possible that there may be some sort of resemblance, if mind moulds feature; they think in the same way. I have thought a good deal about Lilian lately. She seems to have blossomed out all at once into womanhood. What a lovely girl she is! I don't wonder that poor old Adolf fell so deeply in love with her."

"No, nor I. I think any man might be proud to call Lilian his wife. It is n't merely that she is so lovely. She seems to me pure and noble above all the women I have ever met. When one compares her with others, one sees the difference. Can you imagine Lilian with a painted face? Or stooping to intrigue or lies? Or doing the hundred and one underhand things that women of the world seem absolutely to rejoice in? But I am not very happy about her. I have a vague presentiment that trouble is coming upon her. I don't know, I can't imagine

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what. But if any evil happened to that child, it would kill me."

"Evil and dear little Lilian! No, no! we won't associate the two ideas. Poor old Adolf said that anyone who injured her deserved to be shot; and I agree with him. But I hear the coach!"

He suddenly sprang up, and looked out of the window.

"Yes, dear aunt, there it is; and the Duke is handling his team like the consummate whip he is. By Jove! Lilian is on the box seat by him. I'm more than half inclined to think that his Grace of Shropshire means something serious by his attentions to her."

Savile spoke lightly; but the manner in which their host singled out Lilian from all his other guests was sovereignly displeasing to him. And he experienced a strange sinking at the heart on noticing the bright smile that came upon her face as she looked up when the Duke helped her off the coach.

There was a smile too on Mrs. Tremeneere's face as she stood by Philip's side, watching the gay party.

"What a splendid match it would be for her, if she married the Duke!" the old lady said, thinking aloud, "but not more than she deserves. I sometimes fancy he is taken by that Miss Karsdale, who is n't good enough for him. Don't you think so, Philip? I should be very sorry if *you* were attracted by her, in spite of her large fortune."

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"My dear aunt, I believe if I married one of the Royal Princesses, you would think I was thrown away!" laughed Savile; "but it is rather nice to have someone in the world to be silly over one. Now we had better go downstairs and meet them."

"Yes," she said; "go on. I will find my way to the drawing-rooms."

Philip went down quickly in the hope that he might get hold of Lilian and induce her to go for a stroll in the woods. But as usual he reckoned without Lady Mary, who intercepted him.

"Sir Philip, do come and take me for a little walk! I feel quite cramped after that long drive; but it was all very charming. The ruins were quite delightful," she said in her low *trainante* voice—she, who hated ruins and detested long drives.

To exchange the tête-à-tête with Lilian, which he particularly wanted, for one with Lady Mary, for which he was not in the least inclined, exasperated him. He could not excuse himself. How could he? But he felt, with shame, that he should behave badly, and that exasperated him more.

To his relief, Lady Helena offered to accompany them, and trotted by their side, giving them an animated description of the wonderful improvements her brother was about to effect in the Castle, now that he had at last brought every farmhouse and every cottage on the estate up to his standard.

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When they returned, he found Lilian busy playing tennis; and the game lasted till it was time to dress.

Lots were again drawn for the ladies before dinner. This time Kitty Karsdale fell to the Duke, and Lilian, who was on his left, to Sir Everard Bassett. Savile took in Lady Helena, and sat between her and Kitty. O'Flaherty drew Lady Mary, and the Bishop, Mrs. Tremenheere.

Kitty was full of curiosity about the castle, and listened with the deepest interest to the Duke's stories concerning the place and his ancestors who had dwelt there from the first.

"How I should like to be a Bracy!" the girl said with frank enthusiasm.

"Would you?" smiled the Duke. "There was one of them who is curiously like you. I must show you her picture. It is hanging just now in my room."

But, realising suddenly what interpretation might be put on her words, the girl became crimson.

"Forgive my *gaucherie*," she said in her distress. "I mean how nice it would be to think that all those warriors and diplomatists and statesmen and court beauties and other great persons were one's own kith and kin."

"It would be very nice for *them* to claim so charming a young lady as their kinswoman," the Duke said, looking very kindly at the blushing girl. "Some of them, I am afraid," he went on, to relieve her embarrassment, "were no great credit to our race. But, on the whole, perhaps,

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the Bracys have served their day and generation fairly well; and that," he added in a graver tone, "is what we must all try to do, you know. They have helped to make England what it is."

"And they, with our other great families, do much to keep it what it is," said O'Flaherty. "They save us from becoming a mere plutocracy."

"You must tell me afterwards, Duke, what a plutocracy is, don't forget!" Kitty whispered.

"I agree with Mr. O'Flaherty," said the Bishop, from the other side of the table. "Burke would not have disowned that sentiment."

"No," added Bassett, interrupting, much against his inclination, a tête-à-tête with Lilian, to make his contribution to the discussion. "Burke, of all men of his time, had the clearest eyes; and he certainly would have realised that fact."

Savile had been unusually silent during dinner. He had made a show of listening with much attention to Lady Helena, who was a great talker. But his mind was elsewhere, and, good-natured as she was, she would not have been altogether pleased if she had known how few of her words were really heard by him. Now he thought he ought to say something on the topic started by O'Flaherty; but just as he was about to begin, he looked across the table to Lilian. Their eyes met; he saw the colour mounting softly in her cheeks, and a startled expression, as if she read something strange in his glance, came over her features. Then she

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turned and put to the Duke some question which Savile did not hear; but he saw the look of pleasure and interest in her face as she listened to the answer. Did she really care for the Duke? He could bear the suspense no longer. After dinner he would contrive to get her to himself in the garden, and then —

And then Lady Helena rose and the ladies left the dining-room.

When he joined them some half hour later, Lady Mary beckoned him imperiously to her side: "Philip, I must speak to you alone; I have seen nothing of you all day," she said in a low voice. "Come into the garden; I have something to say to you."

There was no help for it. He had to obey. He followed her superb figure out of the window on to the terrace, and, casting a lingering glance behind him, he saw that Lilian and Kitty were talking together, and that the Duke had made his way to their side.

"Philip, what has come to you?" Lady Mary began. "I have never, never seen you so dis-trait and — sulky — yes, positively sulky! Are you ill?"

"No, I'm all right. I'm sorry I seem sulky."

"Then there is no excuse for you. How are you getting on with Kitty?"

"I'm not getting on; I don't want to get on; nor does she want me to," he said irritably.

"Oh, yes, she does! And if you don't make the running, you will be out of it. I think Sir Everard Bassett, who is certain to marry

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again, is taken with her; and I'm not sure Henry is n't. What a dull dinner! And how prudish Henry is. Did you notice how he changed the conversation because I mentioned Betty Vavasour's divorce case?"

"I don't think the Duke prudish; but there were young girls present," Savile answered shortly.

"How I detest them! Bread-and-butter misses should be kept in the school-room. Well, do you see, Philip, that it is absolutely necessary that you should propose to Kitty, unless — well, you know that ruin is staring you in the face."

"You drive me too hard! and I don't like the job; and I don't feel sure the girl will have me. But we must n't stay here any longer. It is too marked. I will do anything you wish," he added, looking into her passionate eyes as she stood before him and cast over him once more the spell of her voluptuous beauty. Then they moved across the lawn, through one of the open windows into the yellow drawing-room, where Mr. O'Flaherty, who had an admirable tenor voice, was delighting them with those lovely old Irish melodies which Moore has wedded to words so alien from the original.

Meanwhile, Sir Everard Bassett had been engaged in earnest colloquy with Mrs. Tremeneere, whose husband had held a high position at the Foreign Office, and had been a close friend of the new Ambassador's. He spoke of the deep impression Lilian had made on him,

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and asked advice. It would be a liberty to propose to her on the very slight acquaintance which had sprung up in the two days they had spent together at the Castle. Besides, he thought there might be an understanding between her and their host, even if the Duke had not formally declared himself. But if she was free, it would be his happiness to wait and hope. His words were earnest and well chosen. And the pleased old lady said what she could in reply, — which, after all, was n't much. Then Lilian began to sing, and went on for the rest of the evening.

"Sir Everard Bassett wants to marry you," Mrs. Tremenheere said, when the girl kissed her for the night.

"I don't want to marry him," Lilian replied. "Please tell him that very, very nicely, for he is very, very nice.

"Is it becoming the fashion to propose by proxy?" the girl asked herself with a smile, as she went to her room.

But Mrs. Tremenheere was confirmed in her conviction that the Duke stopped the way.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE two days that followed were full of annoyance and vexation to Savile. Williamson's prophecy had already come true. The silken chains he had thrown round his neck with

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a light heart, some three years ago, had turned to iron ; and the iron was entering into his soul. Every moment of the day he was compelled to spend by Lady Mary's side, except when he was sent to play tennis with Kitty, or to take her for a walk or ride. The girl amused him with her merry chatter, and he flirted with her as was his wont ; but no serious word passed his lips. The scales had fallen from his eyes. He no longer hid from himself that he loved Lilian — with the first pure passion of his life. What would he not give to throw off the slavery that had become so intolerably irksome ? — to escape from the woman to whom he was so firmly bound by links of dishonour ? Give ? What had he to give ? Bankrupt alike in money and in love. He was consumed by the wish to be alone with Lilian. And he could not help seeing that she intentionally thwarted it. She was willing to chat with him as long as others were present. If they moved away, she immediately followed on some excuse or other. And now the last day had come. Some of the party — Sir Everard, the Bishop, O'Flaherty — had already gone. The rest were going on the morrow. What did Lilian's demeanour to him mean ? Had he offended her by that kiss beyond hope of forgiveness ? Or was she regretting her dismissal of Kleist ? Or had she really given her heart to the Duke, as Mrs. Tremeneere exultantly believed ? He was restless and irritable. He ate little and slept less. The suspense was intolerable. The doom of Damocles had fallen upon him. Yes ; the drawn

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sword was hanging over his impious head. To such an one, Sicilian banquets, or ducal dinners, will have no pleasant savour; neither will the melody of birds or harp — no, nor the sweeter music of Lilian's voice — bring repose.

Lilian, for her part, was glad that the visit had come to an end. She had seen — how could she help seeing? — Savile's anxiety to talk with her alone. She felt certain that he would ask her why she had refused Adolf von Kleist's offer. And she feared a tête-à-tête with him, lest she might betray her secret. Her pure soul did not, indeed, realise the nature of the relations between him and Lady Mary. Still, she had noticed many things that had brought the colour to her face, and curious questionings to her mind. She could not understand how a married woman could behave with such freedom of manner. She wondered still more to see how, as a matter of course, Savile obeyed his mistress's imperious commands. She wondered, and she suffered.

Lady Mary had been designedly careless when Lilian was present. She had determined to make it pretty clear that Savile was her own property.

On the afternoon of this day Lilian had gone down to a little sunny sitting-room that opened out on to the great terrace, and was engaged in writing to her little pupil, when a shadow darkened the window, and Savile entered.

"At last!" he exclaimed happily. "Lilian, why have you always avoided me? Do you think that it is proper, respectful behaviour to your guardian?" he added in a bantering tone.

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And he looked into her eyes till her heart beat fast.

"I don't think I have avoided you," she answered, her sudden nervousness getting the better of her habitual veracity. "We have met nearly every day at different times, haven't we? But now I am afraid that I must be going up to auntie. We are starting rather early to-morrow morning, and she always likes me to superintend her packing. Jane packs so badly, she says, and leaves half her things behind."

"They can be sent after her. Now that I have got you to myself at last, I don't mean to let you go!"

He spoke with unusual determination in his slow, lazy tones; and Lilian felt she had no way of escape. The dreaded tête-à-tête was unavoidable.

"Now, come and sit here by me." And with scant ceremony he took her pen out of her hand, and closed the blotting-book.

He knew that Lady Mary had been carried off by the Duke, much to her annoyance, in his cart, to see an ancient nurse, some half dozen miles off, who had expressed a wish to look upon her ladyship once more. The Duke, who returned his servants' devotion to him by devotion to them, was determined that his cousin should gratify the old woman's desire. So the moment had come at last. Lady Mary could not be back for nearly an hour. This time Lilian should not escape him.

How beautiful she looked as she sat before

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him, with the colour coming and going on her rounded cheeks, and the wonderful pale yellow hair curling in soft tendrils on her forehead. Her white eyelids—those eyelids he had kissed—were veiling the grave blue eyes too much. He felt a mad longing to kiss them open.

“Lilian, there is so much I want to ask you—so much I want you to tell me! Once you used to tell me everything. Now you are so distant, so cold to me!”

Cold to him! How little he knew! Pray Heaven he should never know! For a moment she raised her eyes and looked at him. Then, seeing the unusual earnestness in his face, she cast them down again.

“Lilian, will you tell me why you sent poor Adolf away?”

The dreaded question had come! She answered bravely,—she must tell the truth,—“Because I did not love him.”

“But he is such a good fellow, and so desperately in love with you!”

“Have you come again as his ambassador?” she asked with a slight bitterness. Though she knew he had no love for her, it was too hard that he should be again pressing the suit of another man.

“Good heavens, no! I should have hated you to marry him!” he exclaimed impulsively, and then checked himself as he saw the surprise in her face. “But your answer is only half an answer—Why could you not love him? So many girls have gone quite mad about him.”

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"I suppose I am a different sort of girl," she said coldly. "But I think this is a very stupid conversation, and it makes me unhappy, for I am so sorry to have given the Baron so much pain. I really like him very, very much; and I don't want to think any more about it. You have interrupted me in a very important letter to my dear little pupil, who loves to hear from me."

"I wish you would not talk of your pupil! You know how this idiotic determination of yours to go back to the Phillipses annoys me, and my aunt too!" he said almost fiercely.

"I shall be very glad to go back. All this dissipation is very bad for a governess who has to earn her own living," she said with a smile.

"Lilian, you make me positively angry when you talk like this! If you only knew how absolutely unlike a governess you look, you would see the absurdity of it!"

"I am sorry I don't look the part. I would smooth down my hair and wear spectacles, only Lady Betty insists on my being what she considers 'smart.' She is so kind, and likes to take me about with her when she drives." Lilian hoped the conversation was diverging into safer channels.

"Do you see many people? Are there many men in that part of the world?" Savile felt he was diplomatically approaching the question he longed to ask.

"At present I have only seen a few old country squires and the curate."

"And what is the curate like?"

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"Very high church and a celibate."

"Then he is sure to marry! What sort of fellow is he? Do you like him?"

"No, not much; he is so silly and sententious."

"Lilian, you have not answered my question yet. Why did you refuse Kleist?" and Savile looked earnestly into her eyes.

"I *did* answer your question — I told you that it was because I did not love him."

"But *why* could n't you love him? Was it because you loved someone else?" and he drew nearer to her and held his breath as he waited.

But she was silent, while the hot blood rushed into her face.

"Tell me, Lilian! Can't you trust me? Is it the Duke you love?"

"No, certainly not! I like him very much, and he is extremely kind to me, — wonderfully kind. But — but that is all. I rather fancy that he is much taken with Kitty Karsdale. Now do let us talk of something else. I hate discussing these sort of things!"

"Lilian, I must have an answer! More depends upon it than you know. Adolf thought you cared for someone else. Who is it? I must know!"

Again the hot colour dyed her cheeks, and her lip trembled.

"Oh, don't ask me! Do let me go!" She rose as if to depart, at her wit's end; but he caught her hands in his.

"Lilian, look at me!"

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She slowly obeyed. For a moment they stood — looking into each other's eyes.

"Lilian! Is it true? Do you care for *me*? My darling, do you love *me*?"

He threw his arms round her, and held her so that she could not escape his gaze.

"Yes, I love you! To my shame, I love you! Now let me go. You have forced my secret from me. I will never see you again!" she sobbed, and tried to release herself. But he held her closer still, and said passionately: "I will never let you go. I love *you* with all my heart and soul!" He covered her face with eager kisses.

"Oh, Philip! I never meant to tell you. Oh, let me go! It is impossible that you love me!"

"It is possible, darling; it is true. It is you whom I want to make my life whole and sound and sweet. You! No one else. Yes, Lilian, I offer myself, such as I am, to you, to be yours only, yours always. Will you have me? Will you marry me?"

"How can I?"

"Ah, I know that I am quite unworthy of you! I am no Saint."

"I should not care for you if you were. It is not that."

"Then what is it, Lilian?"

"How can I condemn you to a life of poverty? You ought to marry an heiress; auntie has often said so, not a pauper like me."

"You will bring me a greater fortune, Lilian,

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in your sweet self, than any other woman with a dowry of a million. You will bring me a new existence,—an object to live for; an object to work for; and that object—you. Ah, Lilian, won't you trust me?"

"Trust you!" she said, turning full on him her blue eyes, full of infinite tenderness, "trust you! Ah, yes, I do. But—if—"

"There is no 'but,' there is no 'if.' The days of 'buts' and 'ifs' are over. Won't you seal our engagement, Lilian—my love, my wife!"

There was the silence—who does not know it?—of those who are too happy to speak. At last he broke it.

"Lilian, when did you begin to love me?"

"Ah!" she said, nestling close to him, "I can't tell you that. I can't remember the time when I did n't love you. You have always had the first place in my thoughts since I could think at all. That was what drove me from auntie. I was restless. I wanted to be in new scenes. I wanted to be doing something. Ah! how I used to lie awake at Spalton, thinking of you; wondering what party you were at; what woman you were talking to; and wishing—how I wished!—that I were that woman. And now I *am* that woman!" and she laughed happily.

"Yes, darling," he said, kissing her glad eyes; "you are that woman,—the one woman for me."

"And now," she said softly and timidly, "it is my turn to ask you a question—When did you begin to love me?"

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"On that day when you came to dine with me in the Albany; but I did n't know it then. I did n't realise it till I came to plead Adolf's cause with you. It was—don't you remember your own words—as though the sun had suddenly shone out on a darkened world and transfigured it for me. I was dazed. I did n't quite understand what it meant at first. But, as the days went on, I knew what it was—what I have never really known before—love; love for you, darling. It has changed my whole inner self. I feel another man, entirely transformed. Disappointment, emptiness, *ennui*, have fled away. Only your sweet image remains. With you for my guardian angel—my wife—I shall begin the world again, and shall begin it in earnest. I will be worthy of you. If you so wish it, Lilian, I will wait and prove myself worthy of you before we marry."

His deep musical voice, with that indescribable touch of pathos in it, and the liquid brightness of his eyes, stirred her to the depths of her soul.

"No," she replied, "you shall work *for* me and *with* me—and you shall let me work for you and with you. You must go into Parliament again, and take your proper place. I shall be your secretary as well as your wife," and a sunny smile lit up her blue eyes, "and help you to prepare your speeches. I know so many things, you know. That was what put it into my head to be a governess. And then I shall go to the House and hear your speeches. And when people applaud and admire—you know

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how they used to applaud and admire — I shall say to myself, 'That is *my* husband!' Oh, I am so ambitious for you! You must be great, famous."

Silence again fell between them for a minute. Then Lilian said: "Let us go and tell auntie. That will help me to realise my new-born happiness, which seems too great to be real. I feel as if I were in a dream, and should wake up to find you far away, — walking in the park with Lady Mary."

"No, it is all real, darling," he said, drawing her closely towards him and kissing her. She half turned, yielding to the pressure of his arms; then she gave a little cry, and started back. Lady Mary was entering the room by the French window from the terrace.

CHAPTER XXIV

A GLANCE at Lady Mary's face was enough for Savile. He at once braced his nerves to meet the storm. Taking Lilian by the hand, he said in a perfectly calm and deliberate manner: "I am glad to tell you, Lady Mary, before anyone else, of my engagement to Miss Liddell. I have just asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

"Ah! then it is this engagement which is 'all real,'" said Lady Mary, with cutting scorn. "You believe that, Miss Liddell?"

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"Yes," Lilian replied simply, but sick at heart with the foreboding of coming evil.

Lady Mary's tone changed from scorn to irony. "You don't know much about Philip Savile, I should think, Miss Liddell. He has had many 'engagements' of that kind. He is noted for—" she paused and gave a slight cough—"for his *bonnes fortunes*."

"I will thank you not to interfere between Miss Liddell and me," interposed Savile, white with anger.

"That is just what I am going to do," Lady Mary rejoined calmly. "Miss Liddell, of course, knows her own affairs. I know yours. It is for her to judge whether a man as hopelessly in debt as you are could *marry*"—she laid a significant stress on the word—"a young lady quite without fortune."

Lilian covered her face with her hands. Savile, trembling for what might come next, was determined to end the scene.

"I must request you, Lady Mary Silverton, not to meddle farther in my affairs with which you have nothing to do. Let us go, Lilian."

But Lady Mary laid her hand on his arm.

"I nothing to do with your affairs!" she exclaimed passionately. "Who has to do with them, if I have n't?"

"I don't understand," said Lilian; "what have you to do with Sir Philip?"

"You don't understand? You shall understand. I have this to do with Sir Philip, that, for his sake, I have been faithless to my husband

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and forgetful of my children ; that he is mine by the closest ties which can bind a man to a woman. Now do you understand? Or does your charming innocence require plainer speaking? You shall have it, if you wish."

Her great eyes flashed anger and scorn. The girl, with ashen face, turned piteously to Savile. "Oh, Philip, say this is not true!"

His lips moved, but no word issued from them.

"Lady Mary Silverton," she said with unnatural calm, "I believe all that you have said. I will not take Philip Savile from you. You have covered yourself with shame before me, and you have humiliated the man you profess to love. I pray I may never see either of you again!" And she left the room with quick but measured steps.

"Mary, are you mad? Or are you a devil?" Savile cried, seizing her wrists in an iron grasp. She uttered a little cry of pain, and he let fall her hands. "Yes, she is right; you have covered yourself with shame before an innocent girl. You have broken her heart. And you have ruined my one chance of becoming a better man."

"No, Philip, I am not mad; I am no devil; I am your good angel. I came just in time to save you from perpetrating a worse folly than any you have yet perpetrated."

"Folly!" he said bitterly.

"Yes, folly, and of the worst kind! This is your last fancy. And her price is—supposed to be—marriage. Philip, Philip, are you fool enough to pay such a price to gratify your—"

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"Silence, Mary!" he said with a fierceness which startled her. "I owe you much; patience among other things; but I am half mad, and there are limits to my patience. When you talk in that way of Lilian Liddell, I could find it in my heart to kill you."

"Ah, Philip!" she moaned, "have I not given up my faith and honour at your passionate pleading? Think what I have been to you. Think what you are to me. Will you sacrifice me to this new fancy?"

"What has been between us — has been. It can't be altered. But you yourself counselled me to marry."

"Yes, to marry Kitty in order to escape ruin. Then I should not have lost you. Our life would have been the same. She would not know — or care, so long as she was amused. But this girl has a strong character, and would have dragged you from me."

"I love her," he said doggedly.

"Love her! Then you love me no longer?"

"Mary, you make me say things which I detest saying. It seems like striking you."

"Philip, Philip!" she replied in soft and tender tones, "I would rather have your blows than any other man's caresses."

"For Heaven's sake, Mary, don't talk in that way," he said, greatly agitated. "It is all over between us, all over, over. It must be over. My love for Lilian has changed my whole being."

"Your love for Lilian! What of your love for me?"

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"You make me say it. I never loved you in that way."

"Philip, Philip, you have nearly killed me! But we cannot part thus. Come and sit by me," pointing to a low chair by her side. "It is the last time, I suppose, we shall talk in the old way."

He was crossing the room, unwillingly, to obey her, when a footman entered and handed him a note. He opened it, and drew his breath hard as he read the contents: "I have only one last favour to ask — go away at once. I can never see you again — never. Lilian."

"There! — are you satisfied?" and he threw the letter on the table.

She eagerly read it, and turned away her face from him to hide a look of triumph.

"Ah, now you see what this girl's love is worth! She cannot stand the first shock to her vanity! And I, Philip, have I not forgiven you everything, even when you were false to me? Come back to me, and you shall be to me what you have always been — my love — my idol! You have nearly broken my heart. But say one loving word to me. Look at me as you used. Surely I have not lost the beauty you so well loved! Do you remember those twelve hours we spent alone with one another, only last December, when I carried out my plan of missing the train at Mentone, and joined you at that little hotel close by the sea at Alassio?"

"Don't!" he said with a slight shudder. "The past is dead, never to return again!"

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"I can see that room now," she went on, not heeding him, "with the bright moon shining into it, and I can hear the sound of the waves rippling below. What a happy song they seemed to sing as I listened, and watched the beams dancing on them while I drank in your passionate words of love! You told me, Philip, that no woman had ever been to you all I was."

"I told you truly, Mary."

"And yet, Philip, you forsake me. You crush and break my heart. Am I different now from what I was then? Only a few months ago! Have I grown old and ugly? Am I less devoted to you, less indulgent to you? What is it, Philip?"

"No," he moaned; "it is I who have changed. I own it. What a brute I must seem to you!"

"But why," she pleaded, "must you *marry* this penniless girl? Don't you see it simply means ruin to you, embarrassed as you are? Why must you *marry* her? Surely, if she cared for you, as I care, she would come to you without that. And I would n't mind. I am above vulgar jealousy."

"Above, Mary!" he said bitterly.

"Call it below, if you like," she said wearily. "What does the word matter between you and me?"

"Mary, Mary, you don't understand! I would rather blow my brains out than wrong that poor child. How shall I make you understand? No, it is hopeless!"

"It is I who am hopeless. My heart is

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broken." She threw herself into his arms and murmured, her voice growing faint, "Philip! my love!"

Her eyes closed; her weight grew heavier; and Savile, in terror that she was about to faint, clasped her closer. How beautiful she was! And how she loved him! The old spell came over him, as he held her. Losing his head, he kissed her passionately. She opened her eyes. A soft smile curved her perfect lips.

"Take me home," she murmured. "I am ill — I can't stay here. I must go at once. Promise to take me." Her eyes closed again.

"I will take you home — I promise. Go and arrange it, somehow, with Lady Helena. I hear a carriage coming round. We might have that, perhaps." And he loosened his hold.

She went out of the room with tottering steps. But a gleam of triumph soon came into her face.

"He is mine! He is mine once again!" she repeated in her heart. "I nearly lost him. But I know so well how to manage him. And that hateful girl played into my hands with her sentiment and her prudery. He is mine; and now I will keep him!"

In the corridor she met Lady Helena.

"Oh, Helena," she said, "I am so sorry, but I've just had a telegram calling me to town at once, on matter of important business — money, of course," she laughed. "I must have some man's advice, for I know nothing about money; and John is in Paris. So I've asked Sir Philip

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to come with me, and he is too good-natured to refuse. I see one of your victorias has just driven up. May we take it? We shall just catch the six o'clock train."

Lady Helena, too well-bred to express the surprise she felt, consented at once, with due regrets at the premature departure of her guests. And Lady Mary went to put on her things.

Savile stood where she had left him, dazed and motionless, dimly conscious that the old chains of servitude which he fancied, for one brief hour, he had thrown from him, were once more riveted round his neck — and that he would never break them !

In a few minutes his servant entered the room.

"If you please, Sir Philip, her ladyship sent me for your orders, as she says you are going away by the next train."

He passed his hand over his eyes, and stared at his man with unseeing gaze.

"All right," he said at last ; "pack up my things and bring them on by the first train to-morrow. And — wait a minute ; tell Mrs. Tremenheere that I was called back suddenly to London, and had not time to say good-bye to her, but will see her later on, and —"

"Are you ready?" And Lady Mary stood in the doorway, her maid bearing her travelling bag, and a footman a bundle of wraps. "I have explained everything to Helena ; and we have n't a minute to spare if we are to catch that train."

"I am so sorry that you have to go," said Lady Helena, accompanying them into the hall ; "and

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Henry is out riding with Kitty ; they have only just started."

"Kitty! I had forgotten all about her!" exclaimed Lady Mary. "How provoking! But she and her maid must come on with my maid by the ten o'clock train to-morrow. Would you kindly tell her, dear Helena? Much love to Henry. It is provoking to have to rush away like this!"

So she stepped into the victoria. Savile, after thanking Lady Helena for his pleasant visit, and sending a message to the Duke, — conventional phrases that came to his lips as in a dream, — followed her ; and they drove away.

At the station an obsequious station-master put them into a reserved compartment, promising to despatch at once a telegram which Lady Mary had brought ready written.

Savile found himself ministering to his companion's comfort, arranging her travelling cushion, placing her dressing-case under her feet, supplying her with a pile of newspapers, and paying her all those other little attentions to which she had been accustomed on their frequent journeys together. She was far too wise to refer to the scene that had just been enacted. She wore an air of languor and fatigue, and, merely thanking him tenderly, said she was worn out, and would try and sleep.

Still like a man in a dream, he went to the other end of the carriage, lighted a cigarette and tried to think. But he had lost the power of thought. He fell into a comatose state. And then it seemed to him as though the train were

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rushing on, ever increasing in speed, down a steep gradient, down and down and down, till he wondered vaguely if it would break through all barriers and continue its mad course into the sea, carrying with it his dead hopes, his ruined life.

Lady Mary's brougham was in waiting at the station.

"You will come home with me?" she said in her soft musical voice, with a plaintive note of suffering in it which thrilled through him. "I don't feel well; and I am alone; John is in Paris. I have n't even my maid; Annette does n't come back till to-morrow morning. Dine quietly with me. Of course you need not dress."

He started a little. But why not? What did it matter? What did anything now matter? What else was he to do? Better the company of this magnificent woman who loved him with fierce, consuming passion — she had proved it too well — than his own company.

He assented without enthusiasm, indeed, in a mechanical, matter-of-fact way. But she was content.

"Perkins," she said to the butler, when they reached the house in Grosvenor Square, "serve dinner in my own sitting-room. Sir Philip Savile will dine with me. How soon will it be ready? Sir Philip will not go home to dress."

"M. Maynard put the dinner in hand as soon as your ladyship's telegram arrived. I feel sure it could be served in a quarter of an hour, if you wish, my lady."

"Very well. Send Françoise to do for me

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what I want. Annette will not be back till the first train to-morrow morning. Put things for Sir Philip in the blue room."

"Very well, my lady. What wine does your ladyship desire?"

"Oh, that Cliquot which Sir Philip Savile likes. The magnums are best. Serve one. Come, Sir Philip!"

So they went upstairs till they reached the set of rooms dedicated to Lady Mary's own particular use,—a "self-contained suite" as the phrase is, of sitting-room, bedroom, dressing-room, and bathroom.

"You will find me here in ten minutes," Lady Mary said, as she disappeared from her sitting-room into her bedroom. "I shall only just put on a tea-gown."

Only a tea-gown! It was an exquisite creation of Désirée's, — lace over chiffon, — soft, shimmering diaphanous, that more expressed than hid her. Diamonds, which suited her to perfection, glistened on her neck and arms, and nestled in the soft masses of luxuriant hair coiled round her small head shaped like an old Greek statue's. All traces of fatigue had disappeared from her face, and her eyes flashed as brightly as her gems, when the door of her bedroom opened and she joined Savile in the sitting-room, where preparations for dinner had already been made. She looked like an incarnation of Venus Victrix.

"I sha' n't want you any more to-night, Françoise," she said to her children's maid, going back to the door of her bedroom and closing it. Then

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to Savile: "It has refreshed me to take off my clothes. Do you like me thus?"

"Like you!" he almost groaned; and the subtle perfume emanating from her seemed to steal away his brain. "Like you, Mary! Ah, I wish I did n't!"

"Don't be melancholy, Philip," and she passed her hand caressingly through his hair, and nestled, for a moment, her peach-like cheek against his. "I have gone through so much to-day. Be nice to me. Let us make the most of our tête-à-tête in my own sanctum. Let us be happy together once again — and forget that we ever were n't."

The imperious pleading in her voice, and the passion in her eyes, asserted their old empire over him.

A gentle knock at the door heralded the entrance of Perkins and a footman.

The dinner and the wine were perfect. And Savile, weary and hungry, — in a word, beat, — dined as he would have dined after a hard day's hunting. Lady Mary was bright and sparkling when the servants were in the room; tender, when they were out of it, with just that touch of self-abasement which in such a woman appeals irresistibly to a man. As one admirable *plat* succeeded another, and each glass of the Cliquot seemed a finer nectar than its predecessor, her beauty grew more radiant in his eyes, until his senses were steeped in it. The vision of the past and the future was shut off. Only the present had any reality. And the present was — her.

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When the discreet Perkins retired, after serving coffee, cigarettes, and liqueurs, he said to himself, as he slowly descended the stairs,—

“ Her ladyship is going it strong, very strong. What a good plucked one she is; does what she likes and don't care a damn what anybody thinks! I wonder, though, how long she can carry this on!”

The problem exercised the mind of the worthy and taciturn man as he finished the magnum of Cliquot with his supper. Nor had he solved it, even by the aid of several of his master's best cigars, when at midnight her ladyship's bell rang to let Sir Philip Savile out.

CHAPTER XXV

LADY MARY woke at ten next morning. She fancied at first that she was at the Castle. But she soon recognised her own bedroom. She took up a hand-glass which lay on a small table by her side. How fresh she looked; how round her cheeks were; how bright her eyes! That long, dreamless sleep which seemed to come at her command, was a perpetual fountain of youth to her. A slight feeling of lassitude served, somehow, only to intensify her satisfaction with herself. She had had a hard day yesterday. She had played a bold game. And she had won! Surely the penniless governess, with her pale face and prudish notions, was done

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for! The girl could n't, for her own sake, accept Philip's attentions again, even if he were inclined to pay them. But could it be believed, after last night, that he would be so inclined? No, impossible! It was certain that her empire over him was re-established. He was hers, hers! But that marriage with Kitty must be pressed on. It was an excellent device. She did not doubt of her own power to carry it through. For the girl whose hopes she had killed, whose life she had blighted, she had not one thought of pity. Lilian had come across her path — and had been crushed. It was in accordance with the fitness of things.

And at this point in her meditations Françoise entered with her chocolate.

Crushed indeed! The poor child had managed to walk away proudly from that terrible scene, with head erect and eyes flashing and nostrils dilated. But soon her limbs failed her. How should she get to her room? She staggered from the corridor into one of the smaller drawing-rooms which was open and empty, and sat down at a writing-table, resting her throbbing head on her trembling arm. Then she took up a sheet of paper, and wrote that little note to Savile. And then she made a great effort of volition, and stood up, and walked to the door, and gave the note to a footman who happened to be passing, bidding him take it at once. How she reached her room she never knew. She quickly turned the key in the lock. Then she utterly broke down; she sank on her knees by

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her bed, and buried her face in her hands. It was the spot where she was accustomed to say her prayers, night and morning. There she lay, motionless, silent, an iron weight pressing on her brain and threatening to crush the life out of her. She could not think. Only the sense of loss — ineffable, irreparable, infinite — was present to her. She tried to murmur some words of prayer. They would not come. She tried to relieve the appalling desolation by thinking of others who were good to her: Mrs. Tremenheere, her little pupil at Spalton, the Duke, Kitty. In vain! The eye of her mind would not turn away from that inner sanctuary of her pure breast, now ruined and defiled, and its idol shattered. What an idol! She remembered saying, — how long ago it seemed! — ages, centuries! — “I should not care for you if you were a saint!” But she had never imagined that he was — *that*. “A touch of earth,” — the line of her favourite poet came into her mind. “A touch!” What a ghastly satire! The idol was *all* clay, — the commonest, the basest. And *that* had been the object of her worship. That! She had gone to Church; she had said her prayers; she had read her Bible; she had had good aspirations, religious emotions. But, all the time, *that* had been her God! That! She had been worshipping — what? A wicked spirit. And this was her punishment. What a punishment! “A jealous God!” She had forgotten. She had thought He was Love. This was His vengeance! How terrible! Her punishment was

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greater than she could bear. And she was so young! Only twenty. And it would go on, day after day, week after week, year after year—until death came to put an end to it. Ah, if she could only die now! What! and face the awful eyes of that jealous God who was thus torturing her! After all, what had she done that she should be so punished? How could she help loving Philip? Her love had come to her unsought—like her life, alas! How could she have known, how could she have imagined, the story of guilt and shame with which that guilty and shameless woman had broken her idol in pieces? And she had been so happy! Ah, so happy!

At last self-pity did its work. Tears streamed into her dry, burning eyes, and with them came sobs and sighs,—an elemental tempest shaking that fair young frame as if utterly to destroy it.

The convulsion was too great. She sank to the floor senseless. There she lay until the sound of a bell smote dimly on her ear. Slowly consciousness returned—and misery! What was that bell? It sounded like a knell! Ah! it must be the dressing bell. What should she do? There was a knock at the door, which, she remembered, she had locked. It was a housemaid bringing hot water for her dinner toilette.

The woman glanced at her curiously, lighted her candles, and withdrew.

She looked in the glass. How changed she was! It was another Lilian. She could not go

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down to dinner looking like that. Go down to dinner — to face Philip and Lady Mary! Ah, no! How her head ached! How sick and ill she felt! She would escape to bed.

She hastily stripped off her things, and slipped on her nightdress, when Mrs. Tremenheere's maid came in, as usual, to render her such assistance as she might want in dressing.

"Miss Lilian," the old woman exclaimed in alarm, "what *is* the matter? You are as pale as a sheet; your eyes are swollen; you are ill. I must fetch my mistress; we must send for a doctor."

"It is only a bad headache," said the girl, pressing her hand affectionately; "I am not well enough to go down to dinner; I have gone to bed instead; I must keep very quiet; and if I get a good night, I shall be all right to-morrow."

"Only a headache! All right to-morrow!" What ghastly lies! And the girl's tears began to flow afresh.

Soon Mrs. Tremenheere entered the room with alarm written on her kind old face.

"It is nothing, auntie," she said — "another ghastly lie," she thought; "it is everything!" "My head is terribly bad." That was true enough. "Now go down, dear auntie, and make my excuses. Kiss me, and don't come again to see me; let me be quite quiet till to-morrow."

There she lay, in her misery, going over and over again all that had happened on that afternoon. Every time it seemed more cruel. How

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slowly the minutes went! Each seemed an hour. How utterly wretched she felt — and how lonely!

“Oh, Philip,” she moaned, “I wish you were here; you would be sorry for me! I am sorry for you — how sorry! Lost to me — lost to honour — lost for this world — lost for the next! I would lay down my life at the stake to save you from that fiend. My love! my love! I always have loved you! I always shall! And I shall never see you again!”

A great paroxysm of grief came and shook her, and shook her, till, from very exhaustion, she fell asleep. It was but a few minutes of fitful slumber. Then she woke once more to her terrible anguish. Had Philip gone, as she begged him? she thought for the first time. And where was that horrible woman?

The little jewelled clock on the mantelpiece beat out in silvery tones — so soft that they would not have disturbed the most delicate sleeper — eleven. A cold shudder ran through her. Was *she* with him? Where were they?

The door opened very softly. A strange imagination crossed her mind. “Was it Philip?” No; it was old Jane coming to peep the last thing at the suffering girl, to see if she was asleep.

“Dear, kind Jane,” she said, “come and kiss me as you used to do when I was little.”

The old woman kissed her tenderly, and wondered at the fixed look in her eyes, as though she saw some horrible vision.

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"Has Sir Philip gone?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, Miss Lilian; he and Lady Mary left together, quite sudden like, by the six o'clock train."

"Good-night, Jane," she said, and turned over as though to go sleep. Her heart had told her true, then. They had gone—together! Her cheeks were aflame. All the blood seemed to have rushed there, for her hands and feet were icy cold. "I won't think of it," she said.

She made a great effort of her naturally strong will, and set herself to repeat the Lord's Prayer again and again, forcing her mind to dwell upon what each petition meant for her. At last, deep sleep came.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE night clock was whispering in its silvery notes, when Lilian opened her eyes to find Kitty Karsdale sitting at the foot of her bed.

"Dear Kitty," she said, "how kind of you! How long have you been here?"

"Nearly half an hour," the girl replied. "I wanted you to sleep as long as you could; so Hector and I waited. Come here, Hector, and say good-morning to Miss Liddell."

The Duke's great boarhound approached, cast his eyes on Lilian, wagged his tail for a moment, and then lay down, in a dignified way, by Kitty's side.

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"A stately air of mild indifference," Lilian said with a little smile. "But fancy Hector going about with you! I thought he hardly took any notice of anyone except the Duke."

"No more he does in the ordinary way. But he and I have been good friends ever since I came; and yesterday he devoted himself to me in a very flattering manner; and to-day, to my great astonishment, he came and scratched at my door at seven o'clock, and made such a deep noise in his throat when I let him in, and wagged his tail, and looked at me so affectionately. And then he inspected my travelling trunks, and finally lay down by me while I dressed, to Louise's terror. And now he's come on with me here. I feel certain he knows I am going away, and wants to see the last of me. Isn't that it Hector?" And the girl put her arm round the great dog's neck, and nestled her face to his; while he, poor beast, for want of articulate language to answer her question, could only wag his tail and make the noise in his throat again.

"Your last conquest," said Lilian, trying to be gay, and indeed the presence of the bright girl acted like a charm on her. But Kitty had drawn the curtains and looked critically at her friend, and then had stooped down and kissed her.

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty!" the poor child cried, "I'm sure I must look a terrible fright this morning! How could you kiss me!"

The girl kissed her again, and brought her a hand-glass.

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"See for yourself, dear Lilian," she said. "Well, do you look a fright?"

"I don't look so bad as I thought I should," she answered with her habitual truthfulness. "But how pale I am! And how dark under the eyes!"

"That rather suits your style of beauty," Kitty replied. "'T would n't suit me. I can't pity you for your looks. But I do pity you for your trouble, dear. I know you are in trouble, Lilian. Is it anything you can tell me about? You can trust me. I should be as safe a confidante as Hector himself!" patting the dog's head.

How Lilian wished she could pour her story into those kind ears! But no, impossible! It was too revolting. Besides, Lady Mary was the girl's uncle's wife.

"Dearest Kitty," she said softly, "I am in trouble. But I can't tell you what it is. I should like to, but I can't. Only —" and she hesitated a little—"you'll believe me, won't you? It is nothing which would make you think the worse of me."

"I am sure, quite sure of that, dearest Lilian. I don't know any girl as good as you. If I did n't believe in you, I should n't believe in anybody. Yes, I should, though," she added, "I should believe in the Duke, all the same, and in Lady Helena, and in my Bishop."

"And in lots of other people, I'm sure," Lilian replied. "But the Duke deserves a class all to himself. I know only one man worthy

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to go in it." And her thoughts wandered off to Adolf von Kleist. Poor Adolf! whom she had made so unhappy. How he would pity her—if he knew!

Kitty saw the far-off look in her friend's moist eyes, and wondered, and then, with ready tact, changed the conversation.

"Ah! here is your tea. How you must want it! And some nice toast. How hungry you must be! I should be, I know. Oh, we were so dull at dinner! At least, we should have been, but for the Duke. And I could see—I know him so well, don't I, Hector?—that although he made talk for us all, and such nice talk too, something had rather put him out. And dear Lady Helena was n't very bright. It *was* cool of Aunt Mary to rush off to town in that way, with Philip Savile dangling at her side. I wonder she does n't hang him on to her long diamond chain which I believe he gave her. But I do think he's getting tired of her, and would break loose from her if he could."

Somehow Kitty's last words seemed to bring a ray of comfort to Lilian's troubled soul. But she only said, trying to smile, "What a keen observer you are, Kitty!"

"I'm not altogether blind," the girl replied; "and a London season under Aunt Mary's chaperonage would open the eyes of a mole. But how time is going! I promised to breakfast with the Duke and Lady Helena at a quarter before nine. He is going to drive me in his cart to catch the ten o'clock train. And the

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two maids are going on with the luggage in one of his omnibuses. I wish I were n't going," the girl added simply. "I like being here much better than in Grosvenor Square. I don't intend to spend another season as I've spent this. Now, Lilian," — with an assumption of solemnity which made her childish face more piquant than ever, — "I've got two things to say to you: just two."

"That sounds rather alarming."

"One is that I'm so glad to have been with you here. I do like you so much. You're like the Duke in one way; I always feel the better for being with you. And I want you to be my own particular, intimate, fast, and trusted friend. Will you?"

"Yes," said Lilian, gently kissing the girl; "I like you as much as you like me, I think."

"You don't know," Kitty continued, "how much I want a really nice girl friend. I don't like those London girls. They *are* a bad lot. If I told you the things they say and do, without a wink, I should take the wave out of that lovely hair of yours; and I know it's a natural one."

"So is yours," said Lilian, laughing in spite of herself, which was just what Kitty meant her to do.

"I own I'm rather proud of my hair," Kitty continued, "though it is n't so fine or such a nice colour as yours. And I've got such a lot of it; it comes down to my knees, and makes quite a garment for me when I shake it out. I'm com-

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ing down to The Cedars for a night, and I'll show it to you."

"Do," said Lilian, laughing still. "But you must come soon, if you are to see me; for I'm going back to my pupil shortly."

"That brings me to number two. Do you know you make me positively angry when you talk like that?"

Lilian started; they were the words Savile had used.

"We were talking about it at dinner last night, and Mrs. Tremeneere almost cried. I could see the tears forcing their way into her dear old eyes. And Lady Helena said it was monstrous, and seemed quite excited. And the Duke—" she paused.

"Well," said Lilian, quietly, "what did the Duke say?"

"I was trying to think exactly what it was, because his words are very precious, you know. Oh, I remember! He said, 'I do fully sympathise with Mrs. Tremeneere. But Miss Liddell is not an ordinary girl: and if she wishes for occupation, I can't doubt she has good reasons. Helena is right, however, in saying that it is monstrous for her to be toiling as a governess. I quite think, from her conversation, that she might do something in literature.'"

"Did the Duke say that?" and Lilian's face brightened.

"Yes; and then he went on, 'You know, Mrs. Tremeneere, that in our library here we have a number of quaint and curious old books

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and manuscripts. I have long thought of getting someone down to arrange them, and edit some of them, and write about others. Why should not Miss Liddell do that as well as anyone else? You and she might come for — say — three months, to see if she likes it. And a librarian's pay is, at all events, better than a governess's — especially at Bracy Castle!" and he laughed."

"What did she say?" Lilian asked quickly.

"She seemed quite taken aback. She only said, 'How very kind, Duke; it would be so nice!'"

"It is most kind; and it would be most nice. But I can't leave Lady Betty in the lurch, you know. When my holiday is over, I must go back to Spalton." How she longed to go! It would be unbearable at The Cedars.

"Now," said Kitty, solemnly holding up one of her little shapely fingers, "hear my plan, which is a much better one — is n't it, Hector? — than even the Duke's. I told Hector all about it this morning," said the girl, stooping down to caress the dog in order to hide her own embarrassment, "and I'm sure he understood. He wagged his tail furiously and tried to say, 'How clever you are, Kitty! I shouldn't have thought it of you, dear!' Didn't you, Hector?" And Hector, thus appealed to, repeated the performance.

"Well," laughed Lilian, whose desolation seemed to have lifted a little, "now that you have consulted your friend Hector, tell your other friend — me."

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"Don't you know," said Kitty, brusquely, "that I'm very rich?"

"Yes," laughed Lilian.

"Do you know how rich?"

"No," Lilian laughed again.

"Well, I'll tell you. Uncle John, who is my guardian, you know,—he is very good to me,—says that when I'm twenty-one, I shall have at least twenty-one thousand a year. That is easy to remember, is n't it? Now, what am I to do with twenty-one thousand a year?"

"I don't know," said Lilian, still laughing.

"I know what I should like to do with that odd one thousand. I should like *you* to have it. Twenty thousand a year will be enough for my little comforts!"

"You dear, kind, good, romantic Kitty!" and Lilian fairly sprang out of bed and hugged the girl. "Was there ever anyone like you? But I *could n't* take your money, dearest."

"I knew," Kitty replied with a judicial air, "that you would be too proud. I told Hector so. But, you see, you should be my companion, or whatever you like. We two girls would live together. I'm not going to live with Aunt Mary, or with my aunts at Holmhurst; so that would be all right, would n't it? But horrors! It is striking nine; and I promised to be at breakfast at a quarter to. But they won't mind if I tell them Hector and I have been with you, giving you good advice. Good-bye, dearest Lilian,"—kissing her,— "and remember I'm like Uncle John; if I say a

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thing, I do it. So make up your mind to let me have my way," and she rushed from the room, followed by her canine admirer.

Lilian felt her burden a bit lightened by the wonderful affection of the bright little heiress. But, oh, if she could only tell someone!

CHAPTER XXVII

LILIAN was glad to get away from the Castle: how glad! But when the first little excitement of reaching her old home had passed off, she was not glad to be at The Cedars. She was very brave, and tried her hardest to hide her trouble from Mrs. Tremenheere. But in vain. Love sharpened the dear old lady's dim eyes; she saw too clearly that there was something amiss with the girl. The days dragged on in their quiet round. Each seemed to poor Lilian more interminable than its predecessor. How heavily her silence weighed upon her! And she felt—how could she help feeling?—that Mrs. Tremenheere marvelled at it, and, very probably, reproached her for it, in secret. Yes, she must seem unkind and ungrateful to that dearest and kindest old friend. If she could only tell her! What a relief it would be to get away to Spalton! But the day before the one appointed for her return, a letter came from Lady Betty saying that little Fanny was ill with measles,

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—a bad attack. And Lilian's return was postponed indefinitely.

So that way of escape was shut. The girl tried to occupy herself with reading, with music, with letters. And, her naturally strong will coming to her aid, she put aside, now and then, for an hour or two, the thoughts which were gnawing at her heart. She even began to write a novel,—a story of wronged and spurned love. But her own woe was too freshly real for her imagination to work freely amid fancied scenes of sorrow. She took long walks, and on several occasions went into the Catholic church on the other side of the common. On one of these, the service of Benediction was going on. The impressiveness of the ritual, the devotion of the worshippers, the sweet singing of the choir, the lighted altar, the clouds of fragrant incense, impressed her. And when the priest blessed the hushed and kneeling congregation with the uplifted Host, comfort and peace seemed to fall upon her soul. She thought, "I will go and tell all to that kind-looking old man who has just gone into his confessional." She knelt down at the side of it, and saw him through the open grating making the sign of the cross over her. Then she began: "I haven't come to confession, Father; but I am in very great trouble; I thought it would help me to bear it if I could tell you all about it, and that you might advise me."

"Tell me, my child," he said very softly and gently; "I will advise you as best I can."

So, in a voice broken by suppressed sobs, she

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whispered her story in dim outline, but distinctly enough for the priest to understand it. He had not seen her as she entered the confessional, but he guessed that she was young, and knew from her way of speaking that she must be cultured and refined.

"It is a sad, sad story, my child," he said, after thinking for a few minutes. "You may have loved this man inordinately, giving to the creature what is due only to the Creator. But you must not have hard thoughts of God. He loves us—each one of us—far better than we love ourselves. And whom He loveth He chasteneth. Think of Him as a Father, with a father's pity for His children. Be sure this trial—I know what a heavy, what an overwhelming trial it must be—is sent you by Him for some good. Try to believe that, my child. I believe it. And I have good reason. I am now a very old man. It is fifty years since I turned to Him. I have served Him ever since. And He is a good Master. Good? Yes, He is the All-Good. He will never leave me nor forsake me—nor you, my child. Be patient and pray. Never mind about the words of your prayers. Words are not necessary. Prayer is the ascent of the mind to God. Vocal prayer is the lowest kind. He knows each heart and its need. Try to rest in Him. Try to feel that above you is Infinite Love, ordering all things as is best for you; and that underneath you are the Everlasting Arms, which will not let you sink into despair. Yes, 'rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and

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He shall give thee thy heart's desire.' Don't doubt it, my child. He will give thee thy heart's desire, in one way or another; in His own good way. His way is best. Practise your religious duties regularly. And read diligently the Sacred Scriptures. I have had great troubles and adversities myself. And I know what help there is in them. Once, in a crushing sorrow, I lived for a whole week my inner life on the words, 'The Father of mercies and the God of all consolation.' There is no book like the Bible. It is a wonderful book. The longer I live, the more I marvel at the heights and depths in it. It is a refuge in any trouble. Its words speak to the heart as none others do. Again I tell you, my child, that if you are patient under this trial, it will turn to your greater good. 'To them that love God all things work together unto good.' It is hard for you to believe that, is n't it, when you think of this terrible and sudden overthrow of your dearest hopes? But it is much harder not to believe it. No: we *must* believe it if we believe that God is what we know He is; All Good, All Powerful, and All Just. And this man upon whom your affections have been so set—pray for him that he may be rescued from such great wickedness and sin against God. And if he comes back to you, be sure he is changed before you allow his addresses again. Do not be in a hurry; prove him and let him wait. Look upwards for guidance, and you will be guided. Don't doubt it. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord and trust in Him—and He will do it!'

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Yes, He will do it. Be sure of that. God bless you, my child. I will remember you in my Mass to-morrow."

The girl was greatly touched.

"Thank you, Father," she said; "you have comforted me so much. May I come to you again, here?"

"Alas, my child, to-morrow I go away — abroad — to die, I think. I am very old and infirm. It is unlikely that I shall ever come back. But I shall think of you, and pray for you, while I live — and afterwards. And will you say a prayer for me sometimes, that I may die well? And now there are many of my penitents waiting, and I must turn to them. God bless you, my child, God bless you. Bear your cross patiently, bravely!"

And she saw his uplifted hand make the sacred sign before he gently closed the grating.

She rose from her knees, and sat down on a bench hard by, to collect her thoughts before she left the church. There were some ten or fifteen men and women, some of them very poor-looking, and a few children, kneeling or sitting near her, waiting to go to confession for the last time to Father Skinner — that, she noticed, was the name above his confessional. They all seemed sad; some had tears in their eyes.

"I don't wonder," she said to herself. "How good and kind he is!"

And she thought of St. Paul's parting from the Ephesian Christians when "he kneeled down and prayed with them all, and they all wept sore,

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and fell on his neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more."

She felt more tranquil and resigned after the visit to Father Skinner's confessional. But she grew paler and paler every day, and, in spite of her efforts, more and more listless, though ever sweeter and more devoted to Mrs. Tremeneere. That kind old thing knew not what to do. She had sent several letters to Savile, telling him of her anxiety about the girl, and urging him to come. He wrote, as always, affectionately; but he did not come. At last she despatched a note to Dr. Williamson, begging him to call next day.

"I am so unhappy about you, Lilian, that I have sent for Dr. Williamson," she said, when the physician was announced.

"Oh, auntie, you *are* good to me! But why did you? Indeed, I'm quite well."

"I shall feel happier if he tells me so," the old lady replied a little drily. "Will you go and see him in the morning-room, dear?"

"You're not coming with me, auntie?"

"No; I had rather that you saw him alone."

The great physician took the girl's hand in his grave kind way, and fixed his searching eyes on her for a few minutes.

"How long has this been going on, Lilian?" he said. He had known her from a child, and still often called her by her Christian name.

She blushed. How much would he find out? She knew how keen his penetration was, and dreaded lest he should discover her secret.

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"Ever since I came from Bracy Castle, ten days ago."

"How did it begin?" He was watching her closely though she did not know it.

"With a very bad headache the day before we left the Castle." It was so nice, the girl thought, to be able to say the truth — and yet tell him nothing!

He asked her other questions in a quiet and reassuring way, still closely, but unobtrusively, observing her. He soon satisfied himself that the girl's nervous system had undergone, and was undergoing, a great strain. Suddenly he said: "Lilian, I have known you ever since you were a baby. I am your friend as well as your doctor. Won't you tell me what it is?" There was an air of gentle authority in his voice; and he looked at her, the girl thought, as though he were reading her very thoughts.

"I can't," she said faintly; "you, of all men!" And her pale face grew scarlet.

A terrible suspicion crossed his mind. Had the doom of Gretchen, of Hetty Sorrel, fallen upon this refined and noble girl? He put to her rapidly a few blunt and trying questions about her health. Her quick, unpremeditated answers — he would have staked his life on their truthfulness — brought relief to his mind. But — had anyone tarnished that young life and irreparably ruined it, even although his momentary dread was unfounded?

"Sit down on that chair, Lilian," he said, "and let me look into your eyes."

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She obeyed wonderingly.

No, there was no guilt, no shame in those clear candid eyes, — true witnesses to a pure and stainless soul within. He took a sheet of paper and wrote a prescription : "It may help you to eat better and sleep better," he said. "Can't you manage to get some riding on horseback?"

"I don't think so," she replied ; "and, indeed, I don't fancy it just now."

"I wish you could have told me all, Lilian," he said as he took her hand and pressed it warmly. "I will come and see you again in a week."

She was relieved as the door closed behind him.

"What is it, Dr. Williamson?" Mrs. Tremenhoe asked anxiously, as he came into the drawing-room.

"I don't know. Her nervous system has undergone a great strain, and *is* undergoing one. Her physical trouble is the consequence of mental. Has n't she told you anything?" he added abruptly after a pause.

"No ; she is naturally reticent, and I can get nothing from her. She is most affectionate to me, but —"

"I understand," he said. "Perhaps she would tell Philip. Write to him. Get him to come down and see her ; and the sooner the better."

"I have written to him, most strongly, several times," she replied in great distress. "But he does n't come. I can't understand his being so

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heartless. He was always so kind to Lilian, so thoughtful for her."

A ray of light crossed the doctor's quick mind, daily occupied in tracing effects to their cause. To himself he thought, "Philip does n't come, and I—his great friend—am the last person in the world she could tell." To Mrs. Tremeneere he said: "I will see Philip. And now don't be anxious. I'm very glad you sent for me. I'll be here again this day week. If she seems worse, or you would like to see me, let me know, and I'll come at once. Let her take the medicine I have ordered, regularly. Keep her as much occupied and amused as you can. Could n't you get that bright, fresh Miss Karsdale to come and see her? The Duke tells me they are great friends. A fee for me! Dear Mrs. Tremeneere, you ought to know better by this time," putting aside the banknote the old lady tendered. "The pleasure of trying to serve you or Lilian is my fee. In this case virtue is its own reward—its exceeding great reward. Let old Jane come to speak to me in the Hall. I want a word with her. Good-bye."

When Dr. Williamson had gone, Mrs. Tremeneere sat meditating for a few minutes. The nervous system wrong! What could it be? It must be that she was regretting her dismissal of Kleist—as well she might! Yes; lots of little things pointed to that. How stupid not to have thought of it before! Fortunately, he had postponed his return to Germany at the request of

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the German ambassador, who wanted to consult him about some documents on the higher education of this country. She would tell him she was anxious about Lilian, who was ailing and out of spirits, and ask him to come to-morrow. She wrote and despatched the note at once, feeling much pleased with herself, and said nothing to Lilian about it.

As Williamson was driving home, he felt assured that the clue he had hit upon was the right one.

"I ought to see Savile at once," he thought. "But how? I have n't a minute before dinner. At eleven to-night there is that consultation; and to-morrow there is that country journey. Let me think. Luckily I am dining at home and alone. He must come and dine with me."

He stopped at the nearest telegraph office. "Want to see you urgently: dine with me at 8:30, throwing over any previous engagement."

"That will bring him," he said. And when he reached his house in Upper Grosvenor Street he found a reply. Savile would come.

He came accordingly at half-past eight, carefully dressed, as he always was, but pale and haggard.

"I'm glad I sent for you, old friend," Williamson said, "for you evidently want looking after. Half a glance is enough to tell me that. The matter I want to speak to you about will keep till after dinner. Let us talk now of indifferent things, for the benefit of our digestions."

Williamson noticed that Savile ate little, though

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the dinner was good,—the doctor made a point of always dining well and leisurely,—and that he imbibed a great deal of Burgundy, for which he had expressed a preference when asked what wine he would drink. To be sure, the Clos Vougeot was particularly good. But Williamson, who found his one bottle of Margaux a sufficiently liberal allowance, stared a little on observing that his guest was well advanced in a second of the more potent beverage. Savile seemed extremely absent too, and singularly ill at ease for so well bred a man. And his potations, while not at all affecting his head, only made him more gloomy.

“It’s very good of you,” Williamson said, “to come to-night. I suppose you had to throw over somebody.”

“Only the Silvertons. Now tell me what you wanted to talk to me about.”

“Lilian’s health,” the other shortly replied, closely observing Savile, who cast down his eyes.

“My aunt told me she is not well. I’m very sorry.”

“Mrs. Tremenheere told you rightly. I’ve been to see the girl to-day. Her nervous system has had a severe shock of some kind. I don’t like the look of her. She’s got something on her mind which has put her all wrong. I’m seriously afraid of a complete breakdown—I’ve seen too many cases like it—which may mean an early death, or—” and his voice took the slow, deep tone which he was wont to employ when he specially desired to impress a patient—

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"or, what is worse, a hopelessly shattered life; the life of a confirmed invalid."

"Good God!" groaned Savile, "what can I do? What can I do?"

"What have you done?" Williamson asked in the same slow, deep tones.

Savile almost bounded from his chair; but the doctor, carefully noting the effect of the ambiguous words which he had purposely employed, went on as though quite unobservant: "Have you been to see her? Or to talk over things with your aunt?"

"No."

"I advise you to go as soon as possible, if you have still the affection for that charming girl which you have always shown."

"I can't!" and he hid his face in his hands, stooping over the table.

Williamson rose from his chair. The fear which Lilian's pure eyes had exorcised from his mind some hours before, rushed back irresistibly.

"Savile —" and he laid his hand on the other's shoulder — "Savile, surely you have not wronged that poor child!"

"Wronged her!" Savile almost shrieked, starting up. "Not in the way you mean. Good God! I must have sunk low indeed, for you to suspect me of such infamy! Wrong Lilian! I would rather be burned alive in this world, and damned to all eternity in the next!" and he sank into his former posture.

"Forgive me," Williamson said. And then, as the other made no reply, "I thought our old

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and tried friendship, and the poor girl's state, and your own terribly enigmatical words, gave me a right to ask."

"There's nothing to forgive. You have a right to think everything that is base and vile of me!" Savile groaned, not lifting his head.

There was a pause. Williamson, until he knew more, would not gainsay his friend's self-indictment. At last he asked, "Can't you help her, Philip?"

The two men, though on terms of quite brotherly affection, very seldom called one another by their Christian names. Savile, in all his deep anguish, was touched. "I would to God I could, George," he replied, not lifting his head, but putting out his hand.

The doctor pressed it.

There was again a silence. Williamson was puzzled. His clue did not take him far enough. What did it all mean? At last he said: "I don't know if money difficulties fetter you in this matter. Should that be so, you won't refuse my help, if our friendship means as much to you as it does to me. I can lend you — as much as you want, perhaps, for as long as you like."

Savile made no answer, and did not move. He only shook his head, and put out his hand again to press his friend's.

"You see," Williamson went on, in the calm, decided way which he often found to act as a sedative on patients, "I have no children, and have only my wife to provide for. I have always intended that a considerable portion of my fortune

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should go eventually to you, if you survive me—which I think you most probably will," he added quietly.

Savile rose, tears streaming from his bloodshot eyes, and flung himself on the sofa. "She is dying—and it is I who have killed her!" he sobbed. "My darling, my darling!" His whole frame was convulsed as he lay with his face buried in the cushions. The fountains of the great deep were broken up at last.

It is a dreadful thing to see a strong man thus shaken with sorrow. But Williamson's profession had inured him to such spectacles. He looked on pityingly, indeed, but not displeased. "It will do the poor fellow good," he thought. When Savile was a little recovered, he said: "Dear old man, you have had a bad touch of hysteria, but you are better. Wait here a minute." He disappeared and returned presently with a small glass. "Drink this," he said. Then, after a few minutes, "Now I must go off to a consultation. I shall send you home in a hansom." He rang and ordered one. "Go to bed at once. Tell your man"—handing a prescription—"to get this made up. Let him wait for it, and take it in bed, as soon as he brings it. You'll sleep well to-night; better than you have slept for a long time past. To-morrow afternoon I've a country journey; but I shall come back by a train due a little before eleven, and I'll look in on you at the Albany directly I arrive. Keep quiet till then. All may yet be well for her and for you."

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Savile shook his head. The doctor, dismissing the servant on some pretext, himself accompanied his friend to the hansom.

"Drive to the Albany," he ordered the cabman.

"I can't thank you," Savile faltered. "I shall break down again if I try." And he drove away.

The doctor got into his carriage, and went off to his consultation in Belgrave Square, puzzling his brains meanwhile to find the solution of the Savile and Lilian mystery. At last he exclaimed, "I have it! What a fool I am! *Cherchez moi la femme.*" Lilian had told him that her trouble began with a bad headache the day before she left Bracy Castle. Now, as he happened to know, Savile had been of the party there, and Lady Mary too. He saw it all—though as through a glass, darkly. Savile was in love with the girl—that was clear; and there could be little doubt that she loved him. And that baneful enchantress had come between them somehow.

"She ought to be whipped at the cart's tail! Hundreds of women who have been, were saints compared with her!"

When he had arrived at this Rhadamantine conclusion, the carriage stopped at the house of the sick man whom he had to see. The consultation was a long and anxious one. When it was over, he called for a sheet of paper and envelope, and scribbled in pencil this note to Savile: "I want you to promise me not to see Lady M. tomorrow before you see me. Send a wire in reply as soon as possible. G. W."

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CHAPTER XXVIII

SAVILE, in telegraphing to Lady Mary to excuse himself from dining at her house, had given as the reason that Dr. Williamson urgently wanted to see him. She thought it a sufficient reason. He certainly had been looking worn and jaded lately. There might be several causes for that. Anyhow, she quite approved of the fast friendship between him and the great doctor, who, as she knew, looked after his physical fitness. But the next morning she was disappointed to find no letter from him, telling her more than the necessarily curt telegram has told. However, she did not doubt she should see him in a few hours. And even if she did not, it might be well for him to have a day off now and then. He had been as she liked him to be since they came back from the Castle, obedient to her least wish: almost too obedient, indeed, for he had devoted himself to Kitty with really more than necessary assiduity, and almost seemed to prefer the girl's society to her own. That was not nominated in the bond; but perhaps it was a necessary incident if the scheme was to succeed. And succeed it surely must. That curious fascination which he exercised over women, and which Lady Mary, in her more reflective moods, had sometimes tried to analyse, but in vain, was clearly telling on the young heiress.

Meanwhile the season was hurrying on. It

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was now the first of July. Plans for the summer must be made. Silvertown would certainly go, as he always did, to Homburg, where, by a curious chance, Mademoiselle Bergerac was usually to be found in the month of August. Why should not she and Kitty go to the Duke's place in Scotland? He had already given them an invitation. Could n't she get Savile included in it? The fresh air and outdoor life of the Scotch moor would do him a world of good. And there his engagement to Kitty might be concluded and announced. She would go off that very morning, and catch the Duke before he went out, and settle this visit at once. To consult Savile about it did not even occur to her.

So she ordered her carriage and drove to Shropshire House. Lady Helena was out, and his Grace was in the library, the footman told her. That was what she had expected.

"Ask his Grace if he could kindly see me for a few minutes."

"His Grace would be very pleased."

"Forgive my interrupting you, Henry," she began,—the Duke disliked being disturbed in the hour he consecrated daily to serious reading,—“but I've seen nothing of you since I left the Castle. And I want two minutes' talk with you—really only two minutes. I knew I should catch you now.” She smiled her most bewitching smile.

There was, however, no answering smile on the Duke's face. He replied with his habitual courtesy: “You know I'm always delighted to

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be of use to you. Yes, it is quite true; I haven't seen you since you left the Castle," — after a slight pause — "so suddenly."

Lady Mary felt uncomfortable. She knew her cousin well enough to be quite sure that two words thus added apparently as an afterthought, were no afterthought at all. She thought it best, however, not to notice them, but to go straight to the point, and having, if possible, got what she wanted, to retreat as soon as might be.

"I promised to keep you only two minutes, so I'll tell you at once why I have come. You were so very kind as to ask Kitty and me down to Scotland — John, you know, is going to Homburg as usual. We should like very much to come if you are still of the same mind. And as we have several visits in contemplation, I thought I would ask you about what date we might come, and for how long."

"Certainly I'm still of the same mind, and shall be delighted to see you and Miss Karsdale. I suppose we shall be going about the 5th or 6th of August, perhaps a few days earlier. Come as soon after that as you like, and stay as long as you can."

"You're very kind, Henry, many thanks, that will suit us beautifully. I'll settle the precise day with Helena later on. There's another favour I want to ask. Would you invite Philip Savile too?"

"Well, Mary," he said gravely, looking straight at her with an expression which she knew, and did not like, "I'm sometimes told

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that I'm unconventional. But you are something more—or less, is it? than unconventional.”

“No, Henry!” she said with a forced laugh. “No, no, you're quite wrong. I was n't thinking about myself, though Philip Savile and I are great pals, as all the world knows. Why should n't we be? But I was thinking about Kitty.”

The Duke's face grew graver still. “About Kitty?” he observed drily.

“Yes, they would do very well for one another. John's niece requires position; Philip Savile can give it her. He requires fortune; Kitty has five hundred thousand pounds, and when her two old aunts die, she will have almost as much more, John says.”

“*She* requires position! *He* requires fortune! Is that all which has to be thought of? Is it all that *you* are thinking of, Mary, in this precious scheme?”

His face had darkened. She knew and dreaded the storm that was gathering, and would gladly have escaped. But that was impossible. She was in for it, and must go on.

“Oh, Kitty is fond of Philip Savile,” she said, affecting a light tone; “and he's taken with her. Why should n't he be? She's a pretty girl, and nice too. And it is time for him to marry. It's very simple.”

“*I'm* not,” he replied. “You're a clever woman, Mary; but I happen to know you down to the ground. *You* wish to bring about this match—I need not tell you what your real

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reason for wishing it is — and so you are tempting Savile with the girl's fortune. Well, your relations with him don't concern me, except from one point of view, which I shall speak to you about before I've done," his voice had grown very hard. "But I tell you frankly that I see through your manœuvre, and won't help you in it. No," he added vehemently, "by God, instead of that, I'll spoil it!"

She was fairly cowed; but she resolved not to show it, or to give up her plan. So she said: "Why how excited you are, Henry! What does it matter to you? You don't want to marry the child yourself, I suppose? Do look at the thing as a man of the world. Savile would be a good match for her, and she for him. It would be a fair exchange on both sides."

"I've always said that I know nothing which so surely kills the moral sense as the life of a fashionable woman. And you're a striking example of it. A fair exchange! What is that bright little girl to get in exchange for her soul? You — you, to whose care she is entrusted — propose to make a present of her to a man who wants not her, but her fortune. And she is to share him with you. Don't you suppose that every man of the world whose eyes are not blinded must see through this dirty trick? Mary, I knew you to be thoroughly selfish and worldly; but I didn't believe you to be as bad as that. I pity your children; I pity Savile; I pity even your husband."

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Lady Mary's self-control gave way under this scathing indictment. "You pity Savile; you pity my children; you pity my husband," she half shrieked in great excitement; "but you are pitiless to *me*! Don't I need your pity most? Philip Savile is the one ray of light that has come into my life—" (The Duke raised his eyes incredulously, but she went on, apparently not noticing it.) "My husband? What is he to me? I am not to his taste. It's quite another sort of woman that he cares about. I never see him except in public. You know I was sold to him."

"I know nothing of the kind," replied the Duke, who had now thoroughly got himself in hand, and spoke in measured, judicial tones. "I know that your father wanted money badly to pay off his mortgages, and got it from, or through, Silverton. I know, too, that you wanted money, and a lot of money, to pay off your debts, and that they were paid off before your marriage. I know, further, that neither your father, nor anyone else, would have made you marry Silverton unless you had chosen. No, no! it was no sacrifice of an innocent little lamb at the hymeneal altar, Mary, when you married. You had n't been through five London seasons—and in Lady Dashley's set too—for nothing. You took Silverton for better, for worse, with your eyes open, and of your own free will."

"For better, for worse! Yes, but he's all worse."

"No; he is n't all worse. I'm not particu-

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larly fond of him; he's not my sort of man; but he might be a far worse fellow. I can trust his word — and I can't yours. And you — have *you* done anything to make him better? Upon my soul, I think he is far and away better than you deserve. He gives you what you married him for,—any amount of money and your liberty. You are your own mistress; yes, and any man's you may fancy."

"I do not choose to be insulted, Henry," she said, trembling with anger.

"It is not my way to insult any man, still less any woman. It is my way to say the truth. The occasion calls for plain speaking, and plain speaking may do you good—if anything can. Personally, I like you. Yes," he went on meditatively, "I like you as well as I can any woman for whom I have n't an atom of respect. There is about you a symmetry of depravity which I admire in the abstract, and from an artistic point of view, though it is not to my personal taste."

She could bear it no longer, and rose to go.

"Pray stay a moment," he said, "there is something else which I have to say to you;" and he fixed his resolute eyes on her with a look which calmed her at once, and made her blood run cold. She resumed her seat. He reflected for a few minutes, apparently considering how he should put it. Then he said: "I don't complain, Mary, of your liking Savile. I like him myself extremely, partly for his father's sake, partly, and still more, for his own. I don't wonder at

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your — fancying him ; I don't wonder at his falling under your spell. But he is made for better things than his present existence. Surely you must feel sorry when you think — what you can't help knowing — that his relations with you (I suppose that 's the phrase) are spoiling his life !”

“I'm never sorry for anything I do,” she replied in a dogged tone.

“I believe it : and so I won't waste time by trying to appeal to you from that point of view. Moreover, I am the last man in the world to go about as a censor of other people's morals. But I have — unhappily for myself — a place in London society, and that place involves duties. Do you know the story of the showman who chastised his monkey for indecorous behaviour ? ‘Public decency,’ he said, ‘must and shall be attended to while I keep this show.’ I am of that showman's opinion. I keep the show called Shropshire House. I certainly won't admit to it people who don't observe the decencies of life. If you continue to *afficher* yourself with Philip Savile, as you've done lately, I won't receive you ; and I shall ask Helena to strike your name out of her visiting-list.”

Lady Mary turned as white as a sheet. If that threat were carried out, it would simply mean her social ruin. “What have you heard against me, Henry ?” she gasped.

“A great deal more than I choose to repeat,” he said with dignity. “I listen to no scandal if I can help it, and I speak none. A story must be blazoned about at the clubs before it reaches

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me. Do you suppose that with your face and figure so well known, not only to our own set, but to the herd that love to chronicle our doings — and especially our misdoings — you can escape observation by going some thirty miles from London? — that you can stay alone, even without your maid, at an inn near the river in which Savile also chances to be passing the night, without the fact becoming known to hundreds?”

She could have sunk into the earth as her cousin looked at her. She recovered a little when he continued, —

“Your abrupt departure from the Castle, the other day, with Savile, was a pretty strong proceeding.”

“Why, I explained to Helena —” she began.

“I know, I know, — the important business telegram. A very probable explanation, indeed! But it so chanced that *I* was expecting a telegram — also on important business; county business. I did not get it; and thinking it must have been mislaid, I went myself to the post-office to make inquiries, and was informed by the post-master that on that day no telegrams had been sent to the Castle.”

She was speechless.

“Shall I take you to your carriage?” he said suavely.

As he put her into it, he remarked: “Please remember that it is n’t my way to say more than I mean, but less.”

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CHAPTER XXIX

LADY MARY drove away in such a frame of mind as the judicious reader will easily picture ; and the Duke, turning to the footman at the door, ordered his horse.

"A canter in the Park will do me good after that talk," he thought. "'T was n't a pleasant one."

As he was coming back from his ride, he chanced to pass through Grosvenor Square, and saw Lady Mary in front of him, driving out in her victoria, alone.

"I wonder," he mused, "whether what I've said will be enough to turn Mary from that matrimonial scheme? I think it will ; but she's confoundedly headstrong. After all, perhaps I'd better say a word to the little girl herself."

He decided that he would. He decided further that there was no time like the present. Kitty Karsdale might very likely be at home. He rode up to the house and dismounted. Yes, Miss Karsdale was at home, and would gladly see his Grace.

She came into the room with her usual bright smile.

"I thought," he said, "that I should find you alone, for I saw Mary driving out just now, as I was riding back from the Park."

"Yes ; she's gone to Madame Désirée's, and she's sure to be there an hour at least. So we

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can have a good long tête-à-tête. That will be nice."

"I want to talk to you about something which concerns you very nearly. May I? Will you promise me not to think I am taking a liberty, and not be angry with me?"

"How could I think that, or be angry with you?" said the girl, looking full at him with her frank brown eyes. "But you frighten me a little. I ought not to be frightened, though, for you've always been awfully good to me. Not only most kind, but straight, honest, and sincere."

"I've tried to be. You don't find all the people, then, that you meet here, straight, honest, sincere?"

"No; most people seem to be wearing masks when they come to Aunt Mary's parties."

"Masks! That is true: the mask of a society smile which they put on as they come upstairs, and take off as they get into their carriages to drive home. I sometimes amuse myself by speculating what is under each mask as it passes by. I can often give a pretty good guess. Rage under one mask; vexation under another; sorrow under a third; pain under a fourth; and sometimes, — perhaps under the least prepossessing mask, — love."

"All those different things under the same society smile?" the girl said gaily.

"Yes, — those things and more lie concealed under that society smile. Little lady, *you* must never assume it. All that is best in us, — our

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own dignity, our real happiness, our proper life, — all gradually die away, as that society smile fixes itself on us, and our face becomes a lie.”

The gravity of his manner impressed the girl.

“Duke,” she said earnestly, “what is it that you want to say to me? Have I done or said anything you don’t like? Tell me, and I will try to benefit by your advice, indeed I will. Do you think *I* am acquiring that society smile?”

“No,” he replied with an energy which brought back to her face the brightness that had disappeared for a moment. “I see no trace of it, thank Heaven! But,” he added playfully, “we never know what we may come to.”

Kitty came closer to him, and said: “Do tell me what is on your mind about me.”

“It is this: you must not marry Philip Savile.”

“Why?” and there was a sort of mutinous brusqueness about her tone.

“For several reasons; but two will be enough. He does n’t love you; and you don’t love him.”

The girl flushed. “How do you know?” she asked half defiantly.

“It’s hard to tell you, but I must. Suppose Philip Savile did not think of you spontaneously; suppose you were suggested to him by some other woman, and that not for your sake, but for her own?”

“Why should I suppose that?” she asked in a low and rather frightened voice.

“No, don’t suppose it, believe it; for it is true.”

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The girl covered her face with her hands for a minute. Then she said excitedly: "Ah, now I see it all, all! Aunt Mary! But it is dreadful. Now I understand. How often she used to find some pretext for sending me away when he came! And — and, oh! I remember a dozen little things — that I understand now. Ah, what a vile woman! But she is no aunt of mine. She is only my uncle's wife. And Philip Savile! He must be base to seek me as a wife at — at another woman's suggestion."

"We don't talk any more of Mary Silver-ton," the Duke said gently. "She is not your aunt, but she is my cousin, and we are in her house. As for Savile, don't let us judge him too hastily. A man in the hands of a very clever woman is often hardly responsible for what he does — or seems to do. Besides — do you mind my asking you — *has* he ever sought you as his wife?"

"No," the girl said slowly; "but Aunt Mary told me he was thinking about me."

"Aunt Mary told you! That is another matter altogether. Then Savile has himself made no sign?"

"He has paid me a great deal of attention lately. He has never proposed to me. I don't know how far he is serious."

"And you — do you imagine you love Philip Savile?"

"I don't know," she said, hanging her head and thinking. "No, I don't; I'm sure I don't. Perhaps I might some day."

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"Would you stake your life's happiness on such a 'perhaps'? Shall I — may I — try to help you to read your own heart? I think I can. I have watched you so carefully. Well, it is not love which Philip Savile has inspired in you. It is — will you be very angry if I say so? — it is pique."

"Pique!" the girl replied, starting.

"Now you are angry!"

"I should be with anyone else. But — but — you are different!"

"Savile is not a real person to you. You know hardly anything about Philip Savile. It is a phantasm of your own imagination which usurps that name, — a phantasm dressed in extremely well-fitting clothes, and endowed with a curious fascination which makes women run after him. There is among women a fashion in men, just as there is in gowns and bonnets. And Philip Savile — more's the pity, for he is capable of far better things — has been very much the fashion. He used to pay you little attention, or none at all. That rather vexed you; and the thought of attracting him, of winning him, pleases you in proportion. That is all. But there is no love in that — surely? Do you mind my saying all this?"

"Somehow," the girl replied in her frank way, "I don't seem to mind *your* saying it, — at least not much. I should mind very much any other person saying it. But you are different." She was silent for a minute; then she went on impulsively: "How good you are to me! You are

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the best friend I have, — the only real friend. But how difficult it will be for me to stay on here, after what you have told me! How I shall hate it!"

"I had thought of that. On Thursday, Helena and I are going down to the Castle. I will ask her to write and invite you to come on Friday."

"What can I say to thank you enough, Duke?"

"And now," he continued, "to show the extraordinary inconsistency of men, I'm going to ask you to wear a mask till Friday. 'T won't be for long, you know. To-day is Tuesday."

"The mask of a society smile?" she asked, with a very bright smile, by no means of that type, upon her dainty features.

"No, no!" he laughed. "But don't make any difference in your manner to Mary, if you can help it. She is not likely to ask you any questions," he added significantly.

"I think it will be all right," the girl replied. "To-morrow I am going to spend the day at The Cedars, and on Thursday I shall have lots to do before leaving for the Castle. I've been wanting to go and see Mrs. Tremeneere and Lilian for ever so long. But Aunt Mary has always contrived to put some obstacle in the way. She does n't like them I think."

"No," said the Duke; "no more than a certain person does holy water. I'm glad you are such great friends with Miss Liddell — one of the very nicest girls I have ever met, and one of the loveliest."

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"Yes, she is," Kitty replied. "And I always feel that it makes me nicer to be with her. Do you know, Duke," she added, "that I put her and you together in a way. I have two little niches in my mind, — sort of little shrines, don't you know? — and I put your image in one, and hers in the other."

"Hers is a lovely image indeed for your private chapel," the Duke said with a pleased smile. "But you might find something better to keep it company than the image of a weather-beaten old fellow like me."

The girl answered merrily: "I'm not going to let you run down my greatest friend, for that you've proved yourself to be. You aren't weather-beaten, and you aren't old, and you aren't a fellow. You are smart, and in the prime of life, and a great personage!" and she made him a mock reverence.

"Well, little lady," he said, "I'm glad you've recovered your brightness. Helena and I must make you have a good time at Bracy."

"I'm sure to have one," she replied with conviction.

"And get Miss Liddell to give up that absurd whim of being a governess."

"All right," said Kitty gaily, "I'll see to that. Any other orders, your Grace?" Then, with a tremor in her voice, she added: "I can't tell you how I feel your goodness to me. I won't attempt to thank you. I should begin to cry if I tried."

"No, don't," he said, patting her head kindly. "You don't know how good I think *you* to have

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allowed me to speak so frankly. Good-bye till Friday. Say everything kind for me to my friends at The Cedars. Helena shall send you an invitation in due form. And you will write and tell her what train you are coming by.

"I've checkmated Mary now," he said to himself, as he rode away. "What a jade that woman is! Handsome enough, though, to turn any man's head. I should think, however, that Savile must have had enough of her by this time. But he won't find it an easy matter to get out of her toils. She's a *diablesse* of the first water. I don't wonder at Silverton's preferring the Bergerac, — a *diablesse* of another kind and a better, by Jove! 'A mad world, my masters!'"

He went straight to his sister's boudoir when he reached Shropshire House. "I think, Helena, we should be doing a good deed if we asked Kitty Karsdale down to the Castle."

"And a pleasant deed too. I've got to be very fond of the girl. She is not a society *ingénue*. Certainly let us ask her."

"A society *ingénue*! No, I should think not. There's no art and no affectation about Kitty Karsdale. She's as natural as a two-year old. And she's had as much of Mary Silverton this London season as is good for her."

Lady Helena looked at her brother with curiosity, and wondered what had happened, but did not ask. He hated being questioned; and although always replying to interrogatories with courteous words, never allowed them to draw from him a shred of information which he was

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not minded to give. He continued, as if thinking aloud: "I shall be glad to get away from town and to leave behind 'society,' — which is merely a synonym for 'the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world and all the sinful lusts of the flesh.'"

Lady Helena laughed. "I'm afraid society has n't a monopoly of those evil things."

"Anyhow, 'God made the country and man made the town.' So, dear, will you write and ask Miss Karsdale to come to us on Friday?"

CHAPTER XXX

JUST about the time when Lady Mary was in the worst part of her uncomfortable interview with her cousin, Adolf von Kleist arrived at his chambers from Oxford, where he had spent the last ten days, busy with the work he had undertaken for the German ambassador. On his table he found Mrs. Tremeneere's letter. That it meant hope for him, never entered his head. It might, perhaps, mean that he could in some way serve Lilian; and he must go at once. He wrote a telegram. "Just received your letter: so sorry: will bicycle over to luncheon," and sent off his man to despatch it.

"I shall do best to go to luncheon," he thought. "In that way I shall be able to see more of Lilian. I wonder what it can be."

So, a little before one, the Baron von Kleist was

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announced. He found Mrs. Tremenheere alone in the morning-room, and learnt from her how ill Lilian was the day before they left Bracy Castle, and how unwell she had been since; how Savile and Lady Mary had suddenly gone off, and how they had seen nothing of Philip since. Kleist, too, had seen nothing of Philip for ever so long; but he had been away lately at Oxford and before that at Cambridge. And then Lilian came in, looking paler than he had ever seen her, and with an air of lassitude which made the young man's heart ache. She had rather dreaded his coming, when Mrs. Tremenheere had announced it, upon receiving his telegram. But he was strong with the strength of self-control. And the greeting between them was as unembarrassed upon his side as upon hers.

At luncheon he was bright and gay. A man of books rather than of the great world, and somewhat slow of utterance in a language which was not his native tongue, he did not greatly care for English society. But his manners were simple and easy; his knowledge was very wide; his voice was musical; his words were well chosen; and he possessed a vein of quiet and genial humour. There was hardly any subject upon which he could not talk well. Upon this occasion he exerted himself to his utmost to interest the two women. And he succeeded. Lilian was grateful to him for the respite from her melancholy brooding which he brought. Mrs. Tremenheere thought she had never properly appreciated him — nor, probably, had

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the girl who had refused him. She noticed with satisfaction Lilian's pleasure in his society. And after accompanying them to the lawn, and establishing them under the trees, she left them, fondly hoping that the past might be undone.

Such hope was very far from the mind of Adolf von Kleist. He had watched the girl at luncheon, quietly but closely. He felt that some trouble was gnawing at her heart. But he knew that the trouble had nothing to do with him. For a few minutes after Mrs. Tremeneere had gone, they sat silent. Then he said, —

"You do really look upon me as a true friend, don't you?"

"Yes," she replied in her sweet, candid tones. Ah, how they stirred him to the inmost fibres of his being! "I think no girl ever had a truer or a kinder friend."

"Then you won't mind my telling you how grieved I am that you look — may I say it? — so unhappy, so different from what you used to be."

She hung her head, and did not speak.

"Do not think me intrusive or inquisitive, but I have an instinct which tells you are in great trouble. And I do so want to help you."

She turned her deep blue eyes towards him, and he noticed — how could he help it? — that the old brightness was not in them.

"I shall never think you inquisitive or intrusive, or anything that is not altogether kind and nice. It is nothing much, nothing serious. I am not very well."

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He rose and stood over her. Somehow there was an air of mild authority about him, and his voice, though gentle and low, had a ring of grave insistence. "No," he said, "I am sure I am right. Your face tells too plain a tale. It is something very much, — something very serious. Let me help you, or try to help you," and his tones grew pleading and plaintive. "You cannot love me. I shall never ask you for that. But you *can* trust me. That I shall always ask. I have your promise — it was my one consolation — to tell me if you were in trouble, so that I might help you if I could. Trust me; trust me as a brother: won't you?"

"Trust you, Baron! Who could look in your face and not trust you? How good you are to me! But you can't help me!"

"You do not know. I may be able. Let me judge. Won't you tell me why you are so unhappy?"

"Oh," said the girl, subdued by his utterly unselfish devotion, "it would be such a relief to tell it to you. It is crushing my life out, though I try all I can to bear it patiently. But how *can* I tell you! And how can you help me? No; I am past help!" and she stifled a sob.

The strong man was greatly moved. For a moment he lost his self-control.

"Don't say that, please," he exclaimed hoarsely, his blue eyes flashing with anger. "It unmans me. And at the same time it makes me furious. It makes me want to shoot somebody." Then recovering himself, and speaking more

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gently, "Do tell me what it is! I will do anything to help you, if I can. And if I can't, I will be silent; you *know* I will."

She rose and stood by him, as if making an effort almost beyond her power.

"Oh! I *will* tell you. Since I saw you, someone — someone whom I have loved — have worshipped — ever since I can remember, but whom I never dared to think of in that way, asked me to be his wife. No words can express my happiness. Then — in a minute — another came between us. Ah, it is as though the sun had sunk for ever!" And the tears stole down her pale cheeks. She looked in his face, and saw infinite pity there. She went on: "Oh, that woman said such dreadful things!"

"Was he engaged to be married to her?"

"Ah! you don't understand: she — she is married to someone else. She said I was taking him from her. I can't repeat to you all she said."

"But did *he* make no explanation? Did he allow her to say those things to you?"

"He could not help it; there was no explanation. It was the truth."

"But did n't he come to you afterwards? Had he nothing to say to you — after exposing you to that?"

"No: I sent him a line to beg him to go away, and he left at once — with her."

"And this was the beginning of your illness — the day before you left Bracy Castle! Good God! I see it all." And the young man sank on

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a seat and covered his face with both his hands. "It is too horrible! That you should have been exposed to this. And by him! The traitor!"

"No, no!" said the girl quickly; "you must not think or say that. He is no traitor. He was loyal to you. He did his very best to plead your cause, when he came from you to me. He is no traitor to me. I ought not to have let him surprise my secret. But—" and she hesitated—"he told me he loved me with all his heart. And—I did not know of the horrible tie which already bound him to her. And she broke in upon us suddenly, and claimed him. And I said I would not take him from her; and that I prayed I might never see either of them again!"

"Poor child! poor child! it is too horrible," the young man groaned, his face still buried in his hands.

"There, you see," she said, putting her hand on his shoulder, "I have only made you unhappy, dear and kind friend; and you can't help me. I knew nobody could. It would have been better if I had n't told you."

"No: a thousand times no," he replied, withdrawing his hands from his face; and she could see that it was wet with tears. "It was quite right for you to tell me, quite. I *can* help you, and I will. Let me think.

"Philip must come back to you," he said at last.

"But—" and she hesitated.

"But what? Tell me, please."

"Oh, how can I say it to you? Was I not

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right to let him go? I know their bond is horribly wicked. But, after what she has been to him, has she no rights over him? I lie awake all night sometimes thinking about that. You are wise. Tell me."

"No; don't let that trouble you. She has no rights over Philip. Those so-called rights are wrongs to her husband and to her children. You need not, should not think about her. And you love him still?"

"I never have loved anyone else, and I never shall. But that horrible scene — and all it means. Ah! if I could only forget it, and think of him as I used."

Kleist was lost in thought for some minutes. How could he help this poor child! Knowing Philip as he did, and knowing the lax maxims of sexual morality current among men of the world, he could make allowance — which she could not. But how could he tell her this without offending her pure soul?

"No; I shall never be able to think again of him as I used."

"I know; I understand what you are thinking," he said at last. "It is very hard to speak on these things to a young girl like yourself, so ignorant of evil. You do not know men's natures, or their temptations, or their way of life. There is a wide difference between them and women in these matters. Their instinct is different. If I may so express myself, — it is very difficult to talk to you on such a subject, — the instinct of the man is polygamous; the instinct of the

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woman is monogamous. Modesty, shame, are specially feminine endowments. Nature has so ordained it. You must not judge men as you would judge women in respect of them."

"Do you mean that the rule of right and wrong in these things is different for men and for women?"

"The rule? No. But it is differently applied. What is the virtue you admire most in a man?"

"Courage. A coward is the most dreadful thing a man can be."

"And in a woman?"

"Purity," she said, blushing.

"Yes, that is so," he rejoined. "A woman ought to be brave as well as pure; and a man ought to be pure as well as brave. But you wouldn't think so badly of Lady Mary as you do—and rightly—if she were merely a coward?"

"No," said the girl. "We don't expect a woman to be very brave."

"And we do expect her to be very pure. But Philip—you would rather that he were guilty of the fault into which he has fallen, than that he were a coward?"

"Yes," the girl said.

"Then, you see, that although everyone *ought* to practise all the virtues, some are specially required of men and others of women. Our common language bears witness to this. We say of cowardice that it is unmanly; of immodesty that it is unwomanly. Purity is the first law of a woman's spiritual nature: 'Das Weib ist keusch

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in ihren tiefsten Wesen.' It is not the first law of a man's. Take a case from your favourite poet, one of the noblest teachers he surely is. You think of Guinevere as ruined, because she has lost that one virtue which is the keystone of a woman's moral character? "

"Yes."

"But you do not think so of Launcelot, the partner of her sin? "

"No."

"And if Arthur had committed the same fault as Guinevere, he would not be in the same condemnation? "

"No."

"Your instinct leads you right in thus judging. It is the teaching of Nature herself."

"I have never thought about such things till now," she said in a low voice, and her pale cheeks were scarlet.

"I am deeply grieved you have to think about them now. I resent it, as a sort of stain upon your mind."

"I have suffered and learnt. I went to Bracy Castle a child; I left it a woman."

"It is as a woman you must help Philip."

"Adolf!" she exclaimed. "You must let me call you Adolf and you must call me Lilian. I could not talk to you like this unless I felt you were as a brother to me. And you must let me address you as one."

He took her hand and pressed it. "Thank you, Lilian," he said.

"I wish I could marry you, Adolf," she went

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on. Ah, what unintentional cruelty! Her words went through the young man's heart like a knife. "But I have loved Philip all my life. I shall never love anyone else. I don't think I shall ever marry."

"But if he came to you, and begged for your forgiveness, could you not forgive him?"

"It is n't that. It is n't forgiveness which is difficult. It is that my ideal has been destroyed. I sometimes feel as if I could never see him again. I am certain I could not see him now. You said I must help him. How can I?"

"By letting him hope."

"I am sure," she said, speaking to herself, rather than to her companion, "that he was quite sincere when he spoke to me. I am sure he loved me then—at that moment—as he never could have loved *her*. And yet—" she gave a shudder—"perhaps they are together now!"

"I don't believe it," said Kleist, stoutly, though, in his heart of hearts, he by no means felt that confident assurance. "Listen to me, Schwesterchen," he went on. "He shall break with her at once, and for ever. To-morrow I am going to Germany. He shall come with me. There, away from the spell which she has cast upon him, and from all the degrading associations of his old life, he shall call his own ways into remembrance—and turn to better ones."

"Shall this be?" she said. And there was a light in her eyes which Kleist had not seen there that day.

"Yes; this shall be. I engage that it shall.

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And if his love for you is —" the poor fellow's voice trembled — "like mine," he was going to say — "what it surely must be, it will be as a flame burning up his past and purifying his whole soul. The love of a woman like you is a great sacrament."

"If I could only be sure he was delivered from her, I should be happier. She magnetises him. I knew it — oh, I knew it! — the first time I saw them together."

"You are right. It is so. She is a Circe. Once delivered from her witchcraft, he will be — I won't say worthy of you; no one is — he will be different: his better nobler self will triumph, and your happiness will return. It is not dead. It is only grievously wounded."

She shook her head. "It would be sweet to live *for* him. I don't know if I could ever live *with* him."

"Don't think more about it now, my sweetest sister," he said very gently. He saw that the girl was drooping. "When he comes back to you — as he will — a new man, you will do what your heart dictates. God will guide you to do what is right. Don't doubt it. And now let us go in. You are looking tired as well as cold. You must rest."

They walked across the lawn in silence, through the open French window, into the morning-room, which was empty.

"Adolf, I'm so glad I told you," she said, putting her hand in his. "I feel less unhappy."

"God has sent you to be a sister to me, in the

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place of the little one I lost," he answered, still holding her hand.

"You are going away to-morrow? You will write to me?"

"Every week. Oftener, if you wish. You will say 'Good-bye' for me to Mrs. Tremeneere? I hardly feel up to seeing her. Besides, I must go to find *him*. There is much to do; and there are only a few hours to do it in."

He raised her hand reverently to his lips, and departed.

CHAPTER XXXI

ADOLF VON KLEIST mounted his bicycle and rode swiftly away on it to his cousin's chambers. Sir Philip was out, Leslie said; he had gone to Dorrington Manor and would not be back till night.

"I'm glad he's there," Kleist thought.

He had, in fact, fled thither. Williamson's note asking him to promise not to see Lady Mary before they met, had reached him the first thing in the morning. He had telegraphed in reply, "I promise." And the best way to keep the promise was to go out of town.

Dorrington Manor was his place in Buckinghamshire,—a Jacobean structure of modest proportions round which his estate lay. He had never lived there; he rarely went there; and the two old servants in charge were astonished at his unexpected apparition. He roamed through the

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house, looking at the old family pictures and faded tapestries. Then he opened an *escritoire* in the library, and took out several packets of papers, and glanced at them. One consisted of letters to him from Kleist's mother, letters full of tenderness towards her sister's only son.

Saunders appeared and asked for orders about luncheon.

"Luncheon! Oh, anything that Mrs. Saunders can give me: bacon and eggs and a glass of beer."

After his frugal meal, he went out and walked idly through the long avenues of magnificent trees, — memorials of his grandfather, who had been a great planter. He thought he had never properly appreciated the place — which, indeed, was true — till now, when nothing remained for him but to get rid of it upon the best terms he could. How picturesque the stately old house was, built in the times when men knew how to build! How pleasant to the eye the closely mown lawn, — a dream of bright verdure, — with its antique fountain and the well-timbered park beyond! How peaceful the trim garden, unaltered since the last century, with its old-fashioned flowers, its thick box hedges, the small stream purling lazily through it, and its sun-dial bearing the inscription, *Horas non numero nisi serenas!* What a perfect setting it would all have been for Lilian's loveliness, if things had been different — as they might have been! What was to become of her, poor child? Was she really so very ill? Had Williamson exaggerated? No;

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absolute veracity was one of the great physician's characteristics. Poor child, poor child! If she could only care for Kleist all might, perhaps, be well with her. And perhaps she might get to care for Kleist, now that she knew what a worthless scoundrel Philip Savile, whom she had so loved, really was. He tried to hope that it might be so — and could not.

He got back to town at seven, tired and hungry, and dined alone at The Travellers. Then, after half an hour of melancholy musing over a cigar in the smoking-room, he thought he must go back to the Albany. He had forgotten at what time to expect Williamson. He found Adolf von Kleist in an easy-chair, smoking pensively.

"Why, Adolf, I have n't seen you for ages! What has become of you?"

"We'll talk of that another time," his cousin said. "You and I have always been more like brothers than cousins, have n't we?"

"Yes," Savile replied affectionately, feeling a strange sense of solace in the other's company. "It's natural. Our mothers loved one another dearly; and we were their only children, your poor little sister Amelia having died. I've been reading some of your mother's letters to-day down at Dorrington."

"I went to The Cedars this morning," Kleist continued. "I want to talk to you about Lilian. You won't mind if I speak with fraternal frankness?"

"Tell me, tell me about her. And how can I mind anything *you* say to me, Adolf?"

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"I know all."

"She told you?"

"She was looking so ill and so unhappy. My heart bled for her. I pressed her to confide in me. She told me some things she has told no one else. I guessed the rest."

"Then," said Savile, "I suppose you think me the greatest scoundrel unhung. And you are about right. But, Adolf, please understand that I was perfectly loyal to you. I said everything I could to plead your cause with her. All *that* came about after."

"I know, I know! I was n't thinking about myself. I was thinking what I could do for her — yes, and for you too, Philip."

"For *me*?" he said in amazement. "Why, I've ruined the life of the girl you love. And, cousins — almost brothers — as we are, you have every right to hate me. By Heaven, you're too good for this world!"

"Philip, I don't judge you so harshly as you judge yourself. Of course you're responsible, indirectly, for that scene which outraged her so horribly: but only indirectly. I hope I've got her to think less —" and he paused, searching for a word — "less aloofly of you than she did."

"Do you know what *I* was thinking this very afternoon? I was thinking how much better it would be if she could forget me and care for you. I was trying to wish that it might be so."

"No, no," he said sadly, "that has been ordered otherwise. Don't let's waste time — we haven't much — in talking about it. She has

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never loved anyone but you — and never will. She is very ill; I think in a critical state. I want her to live — for you. But if she is to do that, you must live for her. I undertook that you should do two things. And she was less unhappy. Will you bear me out, and perform what I promised for you?"

"I will do anything you tell me, Adolf."

"I promised her that you should break at once and for ever with Lady Mary, and go with me to Germany to-morrow morning, there to stay for awhile and to become another man, more worthy of her — or less unworthy," he said, correcting himself: his word must be a true expression of his thought.

"And that made her less unhappy?" Savile asked eagerly.

"Yes."

"I give you my solemn word of honour to do what you have promised for me. I will see Mary Silverton to-night — I know where to find her — and break off entirely with her; and I will go with you to-morrow."

"See Mary Silverton!" Kleist almost shouted, rising from his chair.

"I must take leave of her — must n't I?"

"Take leave of her, Philip! Have you taken leave of your senses? You know far more about women than — thank God! — I do. But I know something of human nature. See her, and you won't escape from her toils. My promise meant that you should *not* see her."

"What can I do? I owe her something."

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"All you owe her can well be paid in writing," the other replied drily.

Savile hesitated.

"You promised to put yourself in my hands, Philip," his cousin said sadly. "And I thought I might rely upon your doing so after — well, never mind. Then there is nothing for me to do but to go back to Lilian to-morrow, and tell her I have failed." He took his hat, and walked towards the door.

"Stay, Adolf," Savile said. "I'm sure you're right. I will do anything you tell me. I was merely anxious to act as a gentleman."

"Act as a gentleman!" the other replied. And for the first time in their conversation his voice was stern. "Am *I* the man to counsel action unworthy of a gentleman?" There was a look in his eyes before which Savile, brave as he was, quailed.

"Forgive me; you know I did n't mean that. Surely you can't imagine that I meant it. I offer you the most ample, the most unqualified apology for having used a phrase which could possibly have conveyed such an idea to your mind."

"I accept it," he said simply. Adolf von Kleist would endure no word from any man living which seemed to imply a slur on his honour.

"And now," he added, "you will *not* see Lady Mary? And you will write to her to-night, in the plainest and most unequivocal words, that all is at an end for ever between

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you? And you will start with me at ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"I will. I solemnly promise it. But you forget, Adolf. How can I go? Those cursed debts of mine! My creditors will think I am running away from them, and will take proceedings. I suppose I must accept Williamson's money, though it goes awfully against the grain with me." And he told his cousin of his friend's magnificent generosity.

"You may well be proud, Philip, of friendship like that. I see no reason why you should not accept such an offer from such a friend, if it were necessary. But it is not."

"What *do* you mean, Adolf?"

"You remember that my mother always meant you to have half of that legacy of £20,000 which she got from Mrs. Wynstanley. She thought it due to a pure misunderstanding that the money was not divided between her and your mother, and felt strongly that you ought to have a moiety of it. As you know I've often told you, it was only her sudden death that prevented her from giving legal effect to her wish."

"I was reading a letter of hers this morning in which she made reference to the matter."

"You know, too, that I've always considered myself under a moral obligation to carry out her wish, and have pressed the money upon you often."

"Yes, you have, I know. Still, I've no legal claim to it. And, after all, Adolf, £10,000 wouldn't be enough to help me just now."

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"Would £50,000?"

"Yes; that would set me pretty free and would enable me to clear off the encumbrances on the Dorrington property." He did not tell his cousin that he had recently gone into all this with Lady Mary, who had a capital head for business, and who knew far more about his affairs than he did; and that all the papers concerning it, neatly arranged and docketed and tied up by her, lay in a drawer of the table at which he was sitting.

"And the Dorrington property is worth—how much?"

"In my father's time it brought in £5,000 a year. Now the rental has fallen to little more than half of that."

"Well," Kleist said slowly, "you are a free man. Twelve months ago I chanced to be travelling with Max Oppenheim of Frankfurt, to whom, some years before, I had been able to render a service which he thought a great deal of. He's a very good sort, and has been wanting to do something for me in return. He told me, as we were rolling along in the train, of a building syndicate in Berlin which was certain to be a magnificent speculation. I told him I had no taste for that sort of thing, and was n't anxious to increase my fortune. Then I remembered about that £10,000 which I have never regarded as properly belonging to me, though you would not have it. I remembered, too, how badly you want money, and how you have always refused to let me help you. So I talked

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the building syndicate matter over further with Oppenheim. And the upshot was that with that £10,000 I bought a hundred shares in the undertaking. I did it for you solely, reflecting that if I lost, you would be none the worse; and that if I gained, you could hardly refuse to benefit by my gambling on your behalf. Well, your one talent has become five talents; the £100 shares are now worth £500: your £10,000 are turned into £50,000. I shall write to my man of business to-night, telling him to sell at once, and to pay the money into your account at Coutts's."

"Adolf," Savile said, "surely this is a poetic fiction to veil a generosity which, low as I have sunk, I cannot profit by."

"I give you my word of honour that it is simple fact; here are the papers about it," producing them from his pocket. "So let's talk no more of the matter. The thing is settled at last; and it's a weight off my mind."

Savile knew not what to say.

"It is too much, Adolf," he exclaimed at last. "To think that I—of all men!—should have friends like you and Williamson!"

"Well, don't you want them?" the other replied, turning the matter off with a laugh. "By the way, Leslie told me you are expecting Williamson. He was inclined to refuse me admittance on that account. But I said my business brooked no delay. Was n't I right?"

"You are always right, Adolf!"

"Well, then, sit down and write to Lady

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Mary before Williamson comes. And I'll write about those shares. There are some other letters, too, that I must get off to-night."

So the two men sat down at different tables, and took pen in hand, and addressed themselves to their tasks.

"What a difficult letter to write!" groaned Philip, after staring at his paper for five minutes.

"Begin," the other replied cheerily, "and you will soon get to the end."

His cousin's voice seemed to have a stimulating effect on Savile. His pen now flew rapidly along.

"Thank God, it is done," he said shortly, after reading through the letter, directing it, and sealing it. "How right you are, Adolf! I feel a free man. Do you think I might write to Lilian?"

"Certainly, and tell her what you have just done. But I think, if I were you, I would be brief. Don't attempt," he added thoughtfully, "to hurry things with her. She has been deeply wounded both in her imagination and her sensibility, the dominant faculties in woman. You must give her time to recover."

When Savile had finished that letter, and a short note to Mrs. Tremenheere, Williamson came in.

"You are better, Savile," he said; "you look a different man."

"I *am*, thanks to you and Adolf. Had ever anyone such friends?"

"The Baron knows all?" asked Williamson.

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"All," Savile replied.

"I think it would be well that I, too, should," Williamson remarked, "for several reasons. I know some things now, and can guess others dimly. But it will be better for my patient at The Cedars that I should n't remain in the region of conjecture."

"You must know all," Savile rejoined, "the more especially as Adolf and I are going away to Germany to-morrow. I will tell you."

Williamson listened to his friend's story in silence, save that here and there he interposed a brief elucidatory question. When it ended he rose and took Kleist's hand.

"Baron," he said, "you point, with singular force, Kant's argument for a future state and a Supreme Moral Governor of the universe. There *must* be a Hereafter where such self-sacrificing, heroic devotion as yours will gain the reward it merits, and will never have here."

Kleist replied simply, —

"To help towards making the two people I most care for happier, is its own reward."

"Williamson," said Savile, giving him the letter for Lady Mary, "I should like this to reach Grosvenor Square when I am out of England. Would you see that it is posted at eleven to-morrow morning?"

"I understand," said the doctor, repressing a smile, "and I won't fail to see to it."

"And you will write and tell me about Lilian?"

"Yes, once a week: oftener, if there is cause."

"What do you really think of her?"

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"She is a good deal out of health. But she is young, and she is strong. And the knowledge of the change in your life will be an immense help to her. Still she will want careful watching and careful treatment for a time. She shall have both. I shall offer to go down and stay with them at Wimbledon for a bit. I want a change."

"What a friend you are! By the way, I leave everything in your hands—including my horses. What shall I do with them?"

"I'll sell Sunlight for you, if you like. The other two I'll send down to Wimbledon for the present, in charge of your groom, if you'll let me. Lilian will be the better for some riding, if she is strong enough. I'll try to find time to ride with her. And now I must go. It's half-past eleven. Good-night, Philip. I wonder when I shall see you again? Good-night, Baron."

"I must go too," said Kleist. "Shall I come and breakfast with you at half-past eight sharp?"

"Do," said Savile. "I'll walk with you to the pillar post and put these letters in myself."

"May I bring Leslie?" he asked his cousin as they separated. "He has been with me fifteen years. I should miss him; and I think he would miss me."

"So long as I have you at Schloss Göttelstein, safe and out of the way of mischief, Philip,—I've several nice dungeons there,—you may bring a regiment of Leslies. There's plenty of room for them."

And he went on his way laughing, well pleased with his day's work.

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CHAPTER XXXII

SAVILLE'S letter duly reached The Cedars by the first post the next morning. It was marked "Immediate." And old Jane, who knew the handwriting well enough, and shrewdly conjectured that the writer counted for something in her dear young lady's trouble, at once took it to Lilian's room.

The girl was awake and was looking through the open window — she had had her bed placed near it — upon the trees and flowers of the lawn, and was listening to the song of the birds. She blushed when she took the letter.

"Dear Jane," she said, "will you come back to me in five minutes' time?" She must be alone when she read it.

Jane departed, much pluming herself on her keen powers of perception.

The girl broke the seal with trembling hands, and read, —

"I leave England to-morrow with Adolf. I cannot go without one word to you, Lilian — my lost love : lost by my own fault, my most grievous fault. I am rightly punished. I have deserved the words — worse than death — which were the last I heard from your sweet lips. It does not need much courage to die. But to live without you ! without the hope of you ! and with those words always ringing in my ears ! Still, I must tell you — I shall go mad if I don't — that everything I said to you on that day was absolutely true. It came from my heart of hearts. It always will be true. But

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the loss of you made me quite desperate. Since then I have been living in a dream, a vile dream. What Williamson told me last night about your illness aroused me from it. I have broken entirely, and for ever, with — you know who, I won't offend your pure eyes with her name. God bless you, Lilian. I shall think of you always — always. My last word at night, my first in the morning, will be a prayer for you. PHILIP.

“Do send me a telegram to say that you have read this. I hardly dare expect you will. Ah! if you could only see into my heart.”

He had enclosed in the letter a telegraphic form duly stamped and addressed to himself. The girl took it and kissed it, and “irresistible sweet tears” ran down her cheeks.

“He is saved,” she said.

She thought for a few minutes. Then she took up the little jewelled watch — his last birthday gift to her — which lay by her bedside. There was not much time to spare. She rang her bell. Jane came in.

“Jane, dear Jane,” she said, “give me a pencil, quick, quick!” and she clapped her hands as she used to do when a child in a fit of impatience.

The old woman bustled about to get it, delighted at her return to vivacity.

“Stay, Jane, please,” she said. And then she wrote, —

“Thank God for what you have written to me. Lilian.”

“I do hope he will get it,” she thought, glancing again at her watch. And then she added :

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"Will you telegraph to say that you have received this."

"And now, Jane, quick, quick! Make someone run with this to the post: run as fast as they can. It is most important."

What a weight was lifted from her heart, poor child, as she lay there, reading and re-reading her letter. She would read it no more. She had got it by heart. She would bathe and dress, and go on to the lawn and tell the flowers and the birds, the companions of so many dark hours, that a ray of sunlight had come to her at last.

It was a quarter-past nine when she entered the breakfast-room. Mrs. Tremeneere was not down. Another telegram was brought to her:

"I shall live on your words till I see you again — in this world or the next. Philip."

And then she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the carriage drive, and Dr. Williamson was announced.

He looked at her in his usual, searching way, as he took her hand.

"You are happier, Lilian," he said, smiling, still holding the little hand whose tapering fingers tightly clasped the telegram.

"So much, so much, dear Dr. Williamson," she replied; and her flaming cheeks told plainly the reason why.

"I know all," he went on in a gently bantering tone. "Why did n't you tell me on Monday? Do you think a little girl like you can humbug an old practitioner?"

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"Ah! how could I tell *you*," she replied — "you, his greatest friend!"

"Well," and his tone was very kind, "I won't pay you out in your own coin. I will heap coals of fire on your head. He is saved. What I told him about you on Monday night brought him to himself — his better self. You must not judge him too harshly, Lilian. You must not judge him as you would judge a woman. There is a psychical difference between men and women which is as well marked as the physical; and from this results a distinction of sexual character. He will be another man now; a great man, perhaps, — he has it in him — anyhow, I believe, a good one, and, I hope, a happy one."

The girl hung her head, and cast down her eyes. The smart of her outraged modesty was still too keen to permit her to talk of that.

"And now," he said, changing the subject, — his quick perception read her thoughts, — "let us talk about you."

"Oh," she said, "I am better; I'm all right."

"Yes, you are better; but you are very far from all right," he replied quietly.

"Do you think that I am seriously ill? That I am going to die?" she asked. Only a few days ago, she would have welcomed the death sentence from him. Now the fountain of life had sprung up anew in her; and she dreaded it.

"No, you are not going to die, and I cannot say that you are seriously ill. But you are ill enough to require careful treatment and careful watching."

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"I will be a perfect patient. I will do everything you tell me."

"Then there is no reason why you should not be quite well and strong — your old self, in fact, — very shortly. Now I've a little plan which I want to propose to Mrs. Tremenheere."

"Auntie is late this morning."

"And I ought to be in my consulting-room by half-past ten, and must change before that. I can't see my patients in riding gear, you know. They would n't believe in me. So will you take a message from me to Mrs. Tremenheere?"

"Of course I will."

"It is that I should like to come and stay here for a few weeks, if she could have me."

"How delightful!" the girl said; and she rose and took both his hands. "Auntie will be overjoyed, I know. And I can't tell you how pleased I am!"

So was he with the girl's affection.

"I should send down my riding horse, and two of Philip's, and one of my carriages. And I should go up to town every morning on horseback, when the weather allows, and ask you to ride with me, if you feel strong enough, part of the way. We would take the road that goes by Wandsworth Common and Nightingale Lane; then we might get a canter or a gallop round Clapham Common, and you should ride home with the groom; and I would go on to my work and my labour until the evening, when I would drive back and dine quietly with you and Mrs. Tremenheere. I shall cancel all my social engagements."

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"It sounds too good to be true," the girl said.
"But how can I let you do all this for me?"

"You are quite worth doing all this and much more, for. But you must not think me more devoted to you than I am. I shall be doing it, in great part, for myself. I am not well; and it will do me all the good in the world to be here. Unless I am careful, I shall break down before the end of the season. And if I do," he added, laughing, "it will be very nice to have you and Mrs. Tremeneere to nurse me."

She gave a happy little laugh in reply to him.

"We would do anything for you that we could. But if it comes to nursing, I will be the nurse. I don't think I should make a bad one. Auntie would be too fidgety. I will have the blue room got ready for you. It looks out on the lawn. And there is a dear little room opening out of it, which will make a sitting-room for you. I will arrange it all myself. Oh, it will be such a pleasure doing it! And we will change our dinner hour from half-past seven to eight. That will suit you better, won't it?"

"No; let it be half-past seven, please. We will all keep early hours. You want plenty of sleep, Lilian," he added, looking at the dark circles round the girl's eyes. "You have arrears to make up."

"Yes," she said simply.

"Now," and he rose, "I must go. I shall have to ride pretty hard to be in my consulting-room even by a quarter to eleven. By the

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way," he said, as he pressed the girl's hand, "don't you think you might now take Mrs. Tremenheere into your confidence? Your silence greatly troubles her. And she is very fragile. Think how sorry you would be if, when she is no longer with us, you had to reproach yourself with your reticence!"

"I felt I *could* not tell her before. She is so fond of Philip; and it would have been such a blow to her. But now things are different. I will tell her to-day. I will try to put it to her so as to hurt her as little as possible. I will take all the blame I can to myself."

"There is not any blame attaching to you, Lilian," he replied gravely. "And you must not let Mrs. Tremenheere think there is."

"I will be quite truthful. I always try to be."

So he went; and in a few minutes Mrs. Tremenheere entered. She was delighted at the improvement in Lilian's appearance.

"What a wonderful man Dr. Williamson is!" she said.

The girl smiled. Then Mrs. Tremenheere opened her brief note from Savile, and was astonished to hear of his departure with Kleist.

"I seem to be living in a world of mysteries," she complained, and her tone was very fretful.

"Dr. Williamson is right," Lilian thought. "It is getting on the dear old thing's nerves. What a plague I am to everybody!"

But her self-accusation did not seem to touch her much.

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"Auntie dear, finish your breakfast; then let us go into the morning-room. I have a great deal to tell you."

"Thank God you are going to tell me at last!" she replied testily.

"You won't be angry with me, auntie, when you know all," the girl pleaded gently.

So they went into the morning-room, and Lilian knelt down and put her head on Mrs. Tremenhoe's lap, — as had been her wont to do in her childish troubles, — and took the dear old wrinkled hands and kissed them, and told her whole story, extenuating Savile's part all she could.

Mrs. Tremenhoe was as full of compassion for her, as of indignation against Lady Mary. Even for her idolised nephew she had words of extreme bitterness.

"Dear auntie, how sweet you are to me," the girl said. "But you must not judge Philip so harshly. Adolf and Dr. Williamson don't."

"Ah!" she replied, "how good and noble they are! There are no men like them."

"Not even your adored Duke?" suggested Lilian, with a little laugh.

"Well, yes, the Duke, to be sure; but they are three by themselves."

"Perhaps there may be others like them in this large world, if one only knew!" Lilian said, still laughing, and trying to divert the old lady's thoughts from topics so painful to her. "At all events, won't it be nice to have one of those great souls here?"

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"I am more glad than I can say that Dr. Williamson is coming to us."

"Let us go into the blue room, auntie, and make everything as nice for him as we can."

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHILE this was passing at The Cedars, Lady Mary was in a fever of impatience at 100, Grosvenor Square. On awaking she rang for her chocolate and her letters, fully expecting to hear from Savile. Her disappointment made her very anxious and very cross. Perhaps he was really ill in bed. Even so he might have let her know. She would drive to his chambers as soon as she was dressed. But, no ; she could not. Madame Désirée's head woman was coming to fit her at half-past eleven. And that was an appointment not to be trifled with. Then she would go after luncheon. Her husband was lunching at home that day, — a very unusual thing. But he would n't linger. And it would n't matter if he did. At one o'clock, however, this letter came, —

WEDNESDAY, 11 P. M.

When this reaches you, Mary, I shall be out of England. I am going with Adolf von Kleist to-morrow morning. I don't know when I shall come back : perhaps never. I cannot live the life I have been living any longer. *I cannot.* I must tell you the truth. I owe it to you. Since we left Bracy Castle, I have seemed

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like a man in a dream, like an automaton, like a galvanised corpse. What has been between us, has been. It can't be undone. I would to God it could be. But our past — is past. And we have no future. To go on as I have done lately, with you, while my heart is elsewhere, would be utterly mean. It would be a fraud on you. Kleist has made a successful speculation for me which relieves me from my money difficulties, and makes me a free man. And I must try, somehow, to gather up the ragged ends of a wasted life. I ought to have said all this to you, instead of writing it. But I felt I could not. You will despise me. You can't despise me more than I do myself. Forgive and forget me.

P.

Lady Mary read the letter steadily through with gleaming eyes. Then she flung it from her on to the ground, and paced up and down the room like a caged lioness.

"The coward! I hate him! I hate him! He has gone back to that wretched girl, and dares not tell me so! She has forgiven him! I thought I had killed her love for him when I told her what he was to me. I made a mistake. I killed his love for me instead! What do I care? I am still beautiful, and better men than he are dying to throw themselves at my feet! He shall see that I will never play the part of an abandoned and neglected woman! He is as weak as water, and he dreads my power over him. If he marries that girl, I can bring him back to me, and I will do it, and then spurn him from me! The world shall never say that he has thrown me away like a cast-off glove." And then a great

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revulsion of feeling came over her. "Oh, Philip! Philip!" she wailed, and flung herself on her knees by the sofa, and burst into passionate sobbing. She loved him deeply after her own imperious fashion. She loved his handsome face, his charm of manner, his slow musical voice; she loved his admiration of her; she loved the envy of other women when they saw his devotion to her. In time she might have dismissed him herself. But that would have been a different matter. It was he who had cast her off for that pale prude. And of all injuries that could be inflicted on her, the *spretæ injuria formæ*, the wrong to her pride of beauty, was the deadliest. Could she bring him back? Was it worth while to try?

She rose from the ground, dried her eyes, and carefully scanned her face and figure in the long mirror, and thought that it was worth while and that she would try — and succeed.

The door opened and Kitty entered the room.

"Aunt Mary, Uncle John has sent me to ask if you are coming to luncheon. He is pressed for time. But what's the matter?" She noticed the woman's flushed face and glistening eyes.

"Nothing is the matter! Please tell your Uncle John that I am coming, — but at my own convenience, — and beg him to begin without me."

Kitty left the room, making a grimace, but not before her quick eyes had caught the sight of the large handwriting which she knew on the floor.

"A jolly row between her and Philip Savile,"

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she said to herself, as she ran down the stairs.
“I wonder what it is about.”

A few minutes later Lady Mary, pale, but perfectly composed, entered the dining-room with her usual air of *grande dame*.

“I know you will excuse me beginning, Mary, I am pressed for time. You never are, I think. The crack of doom will find you putting on a new gown, and the Day of Judgment will have to be postponed for you. But you look a little severe. Has anything put you out?”

“I have been fitting a new gown—it requires a lot of alteration,” she answered with a light laugh, as usual, keeping the truth in sight. “At times Désirée drives me perfectly mad; but I can’t afford to quarrel with her.”

“Why? Do you owe her money?”

“No; I never put myself in the power of my dressmaker. But she is too great a personage to offend. So I am obliged to subdue my feelings, which is irritating.”

“Well, if you want any more money, there you are. I have had a rattling good week’s racing,” and Silverton took from his pocket a bundle of banknotes whose crispness crackled pleasantly.

“Thank you very much! I am running a little low. But how did you manage to be so lucky?”

“By eschewing all ‘certs’ in the way of tips, and using my own judgment.”

“Well, it is very good of you to give me some of your winnings.”

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"Not at all," he said carelessly, "a present from winnings always brings luck." And he thought of a diamond necklace now on its way to a little house in Queen Street.

"Kitty, you can have the carriage to yourself this afternoon, if you like," Lady Mary said amiably.

"Oh, thanks awfully! But why aren't you coming, Aunt Mary?"

"I have rather a headache, and I've a lot of letters to write."

"What has become of Philip Savile? Why did n't he dine here the night before last? Is he smashed up?" Silverton asked.

"Oh, no! But he is very far from well, and under the care of Dr. Williamson, who has ordered him away. So he has gone abroad this morning with Baron von Kleist. I've just had a letter from him to apologise for not calling to say good-bye. He mentions that he has made some lucky speculation which has quite retrieved his fortunes."

"I should have thought Savile the last man in the world to do that," said Silverton, wondering whether ill health was the real reason of Philip's sudden departure. But his wife's face told him nothing. "By the way," he added, "would you care for a week or two at the Italian Lakes? I am rather thinking of running over to that neighbourhood on a matter of business."

"It would be delightful!"

His proposal fell in admirably with her situation. She would tell her world, by innuendo, that

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Silverton having insisted on her accompanying him to Northern Italy, Philip Savile had taken the opportunity of visiting his German cousin for sport.

"Very well ; then I will engage our old courier to make all arrangements. We might start in a week's time, if you can put off our engagements. Kitty, would you like to come, too?"

"No, thank you, Uncle John. I've had a letter this morning from Lady Helena, asking me down to Bracy Castle on Friday, and I should like to accept the invitation, if you and Aunt Mary approve. I've had a lot of racket this season, and long for a little quiet in the country."

"Quite right, Kitty. Don't overdo it and knock yourself out of time. I'm sure Mary and I quite approve," he said, well pleased at the way in which Lady Helena and the Duke had taken up his niece. "I will ask young Vane and Russell to come with us, if you have no objection, Mary?" He liked the society of well-connected young men. They kept him young, he used to say.

"Not at all. I like them both ; they are clever and amusing."

Everything seemed going admirably. Algy Vane, one of the rising young diplomatists of the day, and in great request in London society, was devoted to her, and not long ago had excited Philip's jealousy. So she would leave England with flying colours. A visit abroad in her husband's company would effectively silence busy tongues ; and the Duke would probably imagine

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that she had taken his lecture to heart. It was just as well that he should.

"What about the children?" Silvertown asked abruptly.

"Oh, they shall go with Miss Dean to that awful Margate. They love its vulgarities, and it's a wonderfully healthy place. I will write to-day to take for them this summer the house they had last year. I have the refusal of it."

"You won't see them for several months," he observed.

"No; but they will be well looked after. And I shall have them with me a good deal before I go."

Kitty smiled. She knew what "a good deal" of the society of the children meant for Lady Mary. Five minutes very rarely in their mother's sitting-room, a hasty kiss, and, by way of valediction, "Now run away, you are pulling all my things about. Good-night, darlings. Miss Dean, don't let them stamp about over my head in the morning."

What had come to her husband? Lady Mary wondered. Always polite, he had been for the last day or two quite attentive. And she had caught a look of admiration in his eyes as she rose from the luncheon-table. Had Mademoiselle Jeanne's attractions begun to pall? Or had the danseuse taken to herself a younger admirer?—a richer one it would be difficult to find. No matter the cause; John's wish for her society came at an opportune moment. The trip to the Italian Lakes would help her to forget. Ah,

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would it? In the midst of her bitter anger against Savile, she was conscious of an intense longing to be with him once more, to feel once again the kisses of his lips and the pressure of his arms, and to hear from him the words which thrilled through her as no others did.

CHAPTER XXXIV

KITTY KARSDALE went down to Bracy Castle on the following Friday by an afternoon train, and was received by Lady Helena in the hall with the kindest greetings. While these were in progress, Hector rushed in with the noisiest demonstrations of joy. He even went so far as to stand on his hind legs, and place his paws on the girl's shoulders, and try to lick her face, an attention from which she defended herself by covering it with her hands.

"No, Hector; we *are* glad to meet again, and I am very fond of you, but really your tongue is too large and too rough."

The Duke, entering, expressed undisguised astonishment.

"I have never known the dog behave in that way before. Really, Hector, your manners have not that repose which stamps the caste to which you are supposed to belong. Will you do me the favour of lying down?" The Duke was fond of saying that we ought to treat the lower

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animals with courtesy, after the example of St. Francis of Assisi.

The dog, apparently sensible of his master's politeness, complied with his request, and with an apologetic expression of face, which was very comical, lay down at Kitty's feet.

"That dog puzzles me," the Duke continued. "I can't make out how he knew you were here. He was in my own room with me, at the other end of the Castle, where I was busy with my secretary—that's why I did n't meet you—and could not possibly have heard the carriage when you arrived. On a sudden he jumped up, and rushed through the door, which was ajar. I followed him with much curiosity, opening one or two other doors for him, and found him welcoming you much too effusively. How could he have known that you were here? I did n't."

"He must have heard us talk about Kitty's coming," laughed Lady Helena.

"I wish," said Kitty, "some great saint would come and work a miracle, and open Hector's mouth, just as the mouth of Balaam's ass was opened, you know, so that he might tell us all about it."

"Our Protestant Church does n't breed saints," the Duke replied, smiling. "The best I can do for you is a Bishop. Dr. Chapman is a most excellent man. But he does n't work miracles."

"Is Dr. Chapman coming?" said Lady Helena.

"Yes: I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. I met him this morning as I was driving in to the

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County Council meeting, and captured him to dine and sleep."

"How delightful!" said Kitty. "I must ask him about Hector. He is so wise, and he explains things so nicely."

"Now," said the Duke, "tell me about our friends at The Cedars, whom you went to see the day before yesterday."

"Lilian has been dreadfully ill, but is better. She is still far from well, however. Dr. Williamson is staying there, partly, it seems, because he is not very well himself, but more, I feel sure, on her account. He goes to Upper Grosvenor Street every morning on horseback. And she rides part of the way with him. He tells Mrs. Tremenheere she is mending daily, and will soon get right again."

"I'm glad, indeed, of that," said the duke. "She is one of the loveliest girls I have ever seen."

"And one of the nicest," added Lady Helena.

"Yes," exclaimed Kitty, with ungrudging generosity, "she is as nice as she is lovely. I like her as much as I admire her."

"And have you done what you undertook?" asked the Duke.

"What, the governessing? Oh, yes; that's all right. We had a long talk. She has promised to give it up, and not to leave Mrs. Tremenheere."

"That is well," the Duke said.

"Mrs. Tremenheere will want her more than

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ever," Kitty added, "now that Sir Philip has gone to Germany with Baron von Kleist."

"That is well too, very well; I had not heard of it."

"Now," said Lady Helena, as the clock struck a quarter past seven, "I will take you to your room, Kitty, and you won't be hurried in dressing for dinner. And then I must order the Bishop's room. I suppose he will be here in a few minutes."

At eight o'clock Kitty made her appearance in a black lace dress trimmed with rosebuds, with a simple band of large pearls — her uncle's last birthday present — round her pretty throat. It was her sole ornament. The girl's taste in apparel, as in many other things, had undergone a great change since we saw her first at Shropshire House — only three months before. The Duke was surveying her with an expression of pleased criticism, when the Bishop entered, and after due greetings to his hostess, held out both his hands to the fresh young girl, who advanced towards him with smiling face.

"I am so pleased to meet you again, Bishop," she said, "and there is something I want particularly to ask you. We must talk about it at dinner," she added, turning to the Duke, and giving him a confidential little nod which made him laugh.

So at dinner they talked about the strange behaviour of Hector, who lay supine upon the hearth-rug, with his eyes wide open and his ears pricked up, apparently very attentive to the conversation.

The Bishop, who had occupied himself a great

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deal with psychological problems, listened with much interest.

"Ah, yes," he said, "our dogmatism about the lower animals, as we call those poor relations of ours, is very great; and our knowledge is very small. 'In Nature's infinite book of secresy, a little can I read' is all that the wisest of us can say. Personally," he went on, "I think the old view which restricts reason, in the proper sense of the word, to men, is the true view. But it is quite certain that sensuous inference may lead to the same conclusions as reason, and that more quickly and surely, and may sometimes transcend them. Do you follow me, Miss Karsdale?"

"Yes, I think I do; and you don't use long words, which is *so* nice of you. But how *could* Hector have known that I was there in the hall, this evening? And the Duke thinks he was expecting me."

"I looked at him now and then," said the Duke, "and I certainly think I saw expectation written on his face, which I can generally pretty correctly interpret. And, from time to time, he would lift up his head, and put it on one side, as if trying to catch some sound travelling towards him."

"The prescience of animals," the Bishop observed, "is most astonishing. There are so many instances of it, quite well established, and quite inexplicable as it seems to me: at all events, no explanation at all credible has ever been given of them."

"Do tell us some," said Kitty.

"Well," he replied, "in years when there is go-

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ing to be a severe winter, many birds of passage will make preparation for their departure earlier than usual. But if there is going to be a mild winter, some species won't depart at all, while others will migrate only a little distance south. If there is to be a dry summer, grey geese and cranes soon withdraw from the neighbourhood of shallow pools where they have established themselves at the beginning of spring, and go to places more abundantly provided with water. In years when floods occur, the beaver is found to build higher. In Kamtchatka, when an inundation is imminent, field mice depart in a body a few days before. There are plenty of other examples, as striking, of this curious prevision, or prescience, in the lower animals: but I won't give you any more, or you will think I am falling into the vein of *Sandford and Merton*."

"It is very curious, indeed," Lady Helena remarked.

"What do you think about it?" said the Duke to Kitty, who had been listening attentively, and seemed to be pondering deeply.

"Oh, nothing much," said the girl, colouring a little.

"You seemed very much absorbed in your nothing," laughed the Duke. "Won't you take us into your confidence and tell us what it was?"

"It was only this," she replied in her frank way. "I was thinking of a verse which I read this morning in the *Psalms of the Day*: 'Oh, Lord, how manifold are Thy works: in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy

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riches.' ” The girl spoke the sacred words in a low and reverent voice, and seemed a little shy.

“That is not a nothing, Miss Karsdale,” the Bishop observed, looking at her with extreme kindness. “It is something very much to have those thoughts.” And then, turning to the Duke, “The man, whoever he may have been, who wrote that fine Psalm, surely understood the physical universe better than many modern masters of science, for he understood it ethically and religiously. It was given to him — in the words of your favourite poet — to look ‘through Nature up to Nature’s God.’ ”

“Yes,” said the Duke, “they are noble lines :

“ ‘ Slave to no sect, who takes no private road,
But looks thro’ Nature up to Nature’s God.’ ”

“They are very noble. To come back, however, to our immediate topic. It would seem clear that the knowledge, or rather presentiment — the Germans call it forefeeling — of future facts, which we unquestionably find in the lower animals, cannot be obtained by sensuous perception or by sensuous inference. But we also find it in man. And in him it is just as inexplicable. We cannot refer it to any process of reasoning.”

“You are thinking, Duke,” said the Bishop, “of the phenomena of second sight and the like — facts as to which the evidence is overwhelming and conclusive.”

“A curious instance of second sight,” said the Duke, “came under my own observation when I was attached to the Embassy in Paris. I was on

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a visit to a country house in Picardy, and in the evening after dinner we were sitting on the terrace, drinking our coffee and smoking our cigarettes, when a Scotch gentleman — Drummond was his name — exclaimed, pointing to a château on high ground some four or five miles distant, ‘Good heavens, the place is on fire!’ We all assured him that it was not, but had great difficulty in convincing him. At last he said, rather confusedly, ‘Ah! now I don’t see it: the rays of the setting sun must have got into my eyes, I suppose.’ But at the same hour, on the next day, when we were sitting after dinner on the same terrace, the château was in full blaze. He had seen the conflagration twenty-four hours before it occurred. I learnt afterwards that Mr. Drummond was of a Highland family.”

“Hector dear,” said Kitty to the dog, who followed her when she left the table, “do you possess second sight? Do you see things before they happen?”

“Perhaps he does,” the Bishop remarked, smiling and looking at Lady Helena, who smiled in return.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE Bishop left early the next morning. As soon as he had departed the Duke took Kitty to show her some parts of the Castle which she had not as yet seen.

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When they were passing the housekeeper's room, they heard the voice of Lady Helena through the half-open door.

"Let us peep in," said Kitty. "Oh, what a nice bright room; and how pleasant after those horrid dungeons! It's dreadful to think that people were shut up there. I'm glad they are turned into wine cellars. But it seems hard upon the nice bright wine to keep it in such a gloomy place."

"You seem quite depressed, little lady, by the domestic arrangements of my ancestors," said the Duke, banteringly, as the three walked along the corridor. "I won't show you any more feudal horrors this morning. Don't you think I had better take her for a ride, Helena, to chase the gloom away?"

"I should love it," the girl exclaimed, "especially as I want to try my new habit."

"What a very uncomplimentary speech!" laughed Lady Helena.

"But I too should enjoy the new habit much more than the old one," the Duke said; "so run and put it on, and come to me in the library when you are ready."

"Dear Lady Helena," said Kitty, "do please always pull me up when I say such *bêtises*, because I want to get out of the way of it. But the Duke is accustomed to my silliness. He knows by this time what a little fool I am."

"Indeed I know nothing of the sort! I think there is a very good head on those shapely shoulders."

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"You don't know how I value the compliment to my head," the girl said with a bright laugh. "I shall endeavour to deserve it by talking so sensibly all our ride. I'll be down in ten minutes," and she tripped away singing to herself.

"What a bright little fairy it is!" the Duke exclaimed as he went off to the library, while Lady Helena made her way to her own sitting-room — she seldom used her mother's boudoir — deep in thought.

"What does it mean?" she asked herself. The delight her brother took in Kitty's society was too manifest to escape even the unobservant. And Lady Helena was far from unobservant. But did he mean anything serious? He delighted in the company of young people. And the freshness and frankness of this very pretty girl evidently pleased him extremely. As evidently, she was on terms of great amity with him, treating him now as a play-fellow, now as a monitor and counsellor. "He is quite the best friend I have, or that anyone could have," she had said once. But had he inspired a warmer sentiment than friendship in that young heart? Lady Helena was too wise a woman to interfere. But she devoutly hoped that disappointment was not in store either for her brother or her guest.

At this point in her musing, she looked out of the window, and saw the Duke mounting Kitty. The two rode merrily away. The new habit certainly suited that neat girlish figure to perfection.

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The Vicar, a scholarly celibate clergyman much in favour with the Duke, dined at the Castle on that evening. And the next day they heard from him an excellent sermon in Bracy Church. After the service, he hurried to tell the Duke about a tenant who had had a bad accident on the previous evening.

"Poor old Jenkins! one of my very best farmers. I must drive over this afternoon and inquire after him. It is a pleasant drive of some five miles; would you like to come?" turning to Kitty.

Kitty said she would be delighted, and looked it.

"Tell them to put Victor into the dogcart and to bring it round at three," said the Duke, when they reached the Castle.

So a few minutes after three, Kitty was seated by the Duke's side in the dogcart. They rattled down the drive at a great pace, and were soon on the high road.

"This *is* good fun! What a rate we are going!" the girl said happily.

"Yes, Victor never allows the grass to grow under his feet: but he is fresher than I expected; he wants careful driving."

"How beautifully you drive! A friend of mine, Mrs. Travers, who drives a coach, always shaves the corners so close that she makes every one nervous. You don't do that. She adores horses," the girl prattled on, exhilarated by their rapid passage through the air, "and — is n't it odd? — she is very like a horse herself! I have noticed that people often resemble the animals

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they like best. People who like horses, have long noses and long necks, and they generally go very straight; but when they *do* kick over the traces, oh, dear! Then women who love cats have little wrinkled faces, and talk in a purring way, but say nasty, scratchy things about their friends."

"You are a keen observer," laughed the Duke. "And what about people who like dogs?"

"It's the same thing. A frivolous, worldly woman always has a little, empty-headed, greedy dog which she dresses in a coat and bangles! And —"

"Sit firm! There is a traction engine coming down that side road. I did n't expect we should meet one to-day. John be ready to jump down," the Duke said, as he tightened his hold on the reins.

A start, a frightened snort, and Victor was flying madly along. A sudden jerk, and Kitty knew nothing more till she found herself lying on the road with the Duke kneeling by her side, and her head resting on his shoulder.

"What has happened?" she said, opening her eyes.

"The cart has upset. Tell me — are you hurt?" and his arm clasped her closer.

"No, not a bit; only my head aches a little, and I feel rather shaky. But are you all right?" she said anxiously. And as she looked into the eager eyes, so close to her own, something that she saw there brought the colour quickly back to her face.

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"Yes, I am quite all right, quite! I fell on my feet somehow. But for the moment I thought you were killed," and he shuddered.

"Where is the horse? I do hope he is not hurt!"

"Never mind about the horse. I sent John back to the Castle for a brougham to bring you home, and told him a man was to go off at once on horseback for the doctor."

"But I don't want any doctor. I am quite well. I only feel shaky and want to rest a bit."

"It will be some time before the brougham is here. And there is no house near. Let me take you to that little wood, across the road, out of the sun."

He raised her carefully in his strong arms. The girl looked up and smiled at him.

"Don't you find me very heavy?" and the bright colour rushed again into her face.

"No, baby; I could carry you for miles and not feel it. But here we are," and he placed her gently on a bank under one of the trees.

She lay awhile, with her eyes closed, in silence.

"Does your head still ache? And have you any pain anywhere else?"

"No, my head does n't ache a bit now, and I have no pain anywhere. I was a little dazed, but that has gone off too. I was only resting, and thinking."

"What were you thinking, Kitty?" he asked. He had never called her by her Christian name before.

She opened her great brown eyes, and turned

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them towards him. There was an unwonted seriousness in her voice.

"I was thinking," she said simply, "how good God is. You might have been killed. And," she added with a little hesitation, "I was saying a little French prayer of thanksgiving which Sœur Angélique, at the convent, taught me."

"*You* might have been killed. Thank God you were not, thank God!"

"Ah! I did not think of that."

"You did n't seem a bit afraid when Victor bolted."

"No; you see, I was with you."

"My darling! Kitty! I must speak. I love you. I want you for my wife. I love you with my whole heart. Can you care for me?"

"You love me? *You!*"

She spoke in a tone of amazement. He hastened to reply.

"Forgive me. I ought not to have expected that you could care for a man so much older than yourself. Forgive me. Forget that I have spoken. You will find some younger man on whom you can bestow the priceless treasure of your love. Kitty, you are crying! My darling, don't cry for me. I shall try and get over it. We shall always be good friends, sha'n't we? Kitty, I can't bear to see you cry."

"I'm not crying for you; I'm crying for myself," the girl said amid her sobs.

"Why are you crying for yourself? Have I vexed you? Have I hurt you?" He was in great distress. He knew not what to make of it.

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"Yes, you have. First you tell me you love me. Then you say that you will get over it, and that we shall be friends! It's horrid of you!" and she sobbed again.

"Kitty, my dear sweet child, what *do* you mean? Tell me; I don't understand. You are making me terribly unhappy."

"Oh, you are very clever, I know. But—but—you are very stupid too. You might know that—that—"

"I might know what?"

"That *I* sha'n't get over it, and don't want to be friends with you; that I love you with all my heart," and she turned suddenly and threw her arms round his neck.

"Kitty! my darling little Kitty! is it possible that you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. I think you are quite the nicest man that is or ever was. I love being with you. I want to be always with you. You are all the world to me. If you don't marry me, I shall never marry anyone."

Her outburst of tenderness and devotion was too much for the strong man. He could not speak. He held her closely in his arms, kissing her soft cheek; and she nestled closely to him.

"But are you sure I shall make you happy?" she said at last. "I'm not good enough for you."

"It is I who am not good enough for you. I'm too old."

"No, you're not," the girl said with a happy

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laugh. "I remember saying to that horrid Mr. Twistleton that I think you the youngest man I know; you are so fresh and natural. I'm not sure that you are not too young, and that I sha'n't have to make you wait for a year or two."

"A week or two, Kitty," he replied in the same tone, kissing her ripe, pouting lips.

"Oh, dear! here comes the brougham. And I am so enjoying myself. No, don't kiss me again, for I'm sure they can see quite well. Why, we've had a dreadful accident, and I declare I had forgotten all about it!"

"You are quite sure that you are not at all hurt? You are not feeling anything?"

"I feel nothing except happiness too great for words in the thought of your love," she said softly, as they walked toward the brougham.

The footman stood with the door open, and respectfully expressed a hope that his Grace was not hurt, nor Miss Karsdale.

"No, thank you, William, we are both quite unhurt," the Duke replied.

And William sprang on the box to inform the coachman, in a careful whisper, that though perhaps he did not know it, he was driving the future Duchess of Shropshire back to the Castle.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

WHEN they reached the Castle, Lady Helena advanced to meet them with anxiety written in her kind eyes.

"I do hope you are not hurt, dear?" she said to Kitty.

"Not a bit, dear Lady Helena," the girl replied, kissing her. "I was never so well in all my life, never half so well," and she glanced at the Duke with a roguish smile.

"And you, Henry?"

"I was never the hundredth part so well in all my life."

Lady Helena saw the situation. She put her arm around Kitty.

"I am so very glad! Henry has waited long for the right girl; and she has come at last. He will make you very happy, dearest Kitty; you don't know how good he is."

"I think I do," she replied softly. "And my one thought, all my life, will be to make him happy; not so happy as he deserves, that is impossible, but as happy as I can," and the big brown eyes filled with glad tears.

"And now," she went on, "I must go to my room and change this dilapidated frock. And I should like to be quite by myself for a little bit, to think it all over, it is so wonderful, and to try to be thankful. And I'll come down to tea," she said to the Duke in answer to a look in his eyes.

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So Kitty appeared at afternoon tea quite rested, and looking delightfully fresh in a white muslin frock.

When it was over — which it soon was — Lady Helena discreetly withdrew, saying that there were some letters which she must write, and that Kitty must always call her Helena.

“Oh, yes,” Kitty replied; “that will be delightful. But it will want a little practice, you know.”

“And now,” said the Duke, when the door was closed, “you will have to call me Henry. Will that want practice too?”

“Oh, no! that comes quite pat. I was trying it over to myself as I came along the corridor just now. Henry! Does n’t it sound quite natural now, as if I had been saying it all my life?”

“Yes, quite natural, sweetest,” he said, taking her on his knee.

“You’re quite sure no one will come in?” she asked, putting her arm around his neck.

“No one will come in without knocking.”

“Well, I shall listen; and if I hear a knock I shall jump off and look demure — like that.”

“Well, keep that look until it is wanted,” he said gaily. “It is very pretty, but I like the one you had before better. And now, dearest little Kitty, we have lots of things to talk about. First, when shall we be married?”

“I should like to be married as soon as possible, for several reasons. I’ve been thinking about it in my room.”

“That is exactly what *I* should like. But tell

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me your thoughts. It always interests me so much to hear them."

"Well, you see, Henry, in the first place, I want to be always with you. I don't like the notion of going away from you at all. Therefore we ought to be married as soon as possible."

"Admirable reasoning and quite conclusive. You are as wise as you are pretty."

"And then, you know, I am a kind of waif and stray. I can't even remember my father and mother; they died when I was quite little; and until I came up to town this season, I used to live with my two old aunts at Holmhurst. They are dear old things and so kind to me. But it would be dreadfully slow to be there after —"

"After what?" he laughed.

"After this," she said kissing him.

"Of course," she continued, "I could go to my Uncle John. He is all right. But I don't want to be with Aunt Mary more than I can help — now that I *know* her."

"Quite so. It is perfectly clear that we must be married forthwith. Will to-morrow do?" he laughed again. "We might get a special licence."

"I should like very much to be married to-morrow. But how can I be? You know I must be married properly, with bridesmaids, and a trousseau, and a wedding cake, and everything grand. Don't forget that you are going to make me a Duchess!"

"Ah!" he said still laughing, "are the pomps and vanities of this wicked world so dear to that little heart? Well, how long will it take to

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make all arrangements so that your Grace may be married properly?"

"Your Grace! How nice it sounds!" she said, laughing too.

"Don't you think we might manage the end of the month? Say about three weeks' time from now?"

"Yes; I think we could manage that. You know, Uncle John will like to make a splash over it. Is that very bad slang, Henry?"

"Not very bad," he said. "You will have to be married from your uncle's house?"

"I think I must be. They could hardly stand the racket of it at Holmhurst. Besides, London will be much more convenient. I suppose I shall have to be at Grosvenor Square until our wedding?"

"Yes, nominally. But really you can spend most of your time at Shropshire House. Helena will be only too delighted. And I don't think," he added significantly, "that Mary Silverton will try to prevent it."

"She won't succeed, if she does. And now, Henry,"—turning towards him and looking him full in the face,— "I've something to tell you. I want you to know the worst of me."

"There's no worst to know, dearest; it's all best."

She tightened the pressure of her arm round his neck for a minute, and then said gravely: "Listen, and you shall judge. I've a confession to make to you. Is this the proper place to make a confession,—on your knee?"

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"Quite the proper place," he laughed. "What is it?"

"I don't much like to tell you. I'm afraid you'll be angry with me."

"I'm quite sure I sha'n't, dearest," he said, taking her hand and kissing it. "But don't tell me. I don't want to know."

"But I *must* tell you!"

"Then *do* tell me, little simpleton," pinching her ear.

"Oh, don't; you'll pull my ear out of shape and make me ugly. Well, I've been a horrid little flirt. I've—I've let two men kiss me. I did n't kiss them, you know," she added quickly.

"Then give me the two kisses you did n't give them," he said merrily.

"How lightly you take it! I'll give you three for being so nice!" And she did. "I was afraid you would be angry. I've never kissed any man but you—except Uncle John; and I kiss him in quite a different way. You're sure you don't mind, Henry?"

"You silly child! Mind!"

"Perhaps you will, if I tell you who they were."

"I sha'n't in the least, my little queen. But I don't in the least want to know."

"But I want to tell you. I must make a clean breast of everything, for I'm never going to have any secrets from you. They were the Count de Champignac and Lord Sempringham."

"Poor Champignac!—the attaché at the French Embassy who died last month?"

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She nodded.

"Ah, yes! A bright, charming young fellow,—the sort of young man I like; a young man who *is* young. Well, I don't wonder. And Semp-
ringham! I don't wonder either. It is a way he has. He kisses every pretty woman he can, except his pretty wife — whom he leaves for other men to kiss."

"How good you are to me! I really was positively afraid you would judge me severely."

There was a knock at the door, and Kitty sprang from her amorous perch, and sat down in an arm-chair, looking her demurest.

"Has your Grace any orders about the post? The postman is here," a footman asked.

"The letters are not ready yet. They will be by and by. Someone will have to ride over to Muddleton with them to catch the post there."

"Yes, your Grace."

"Are n't you coming back, Kitty?" he said, as soon as the door closed.

"Of course I am. I like you to nurse me; I feel so near to you. But we must n't forget our letters. And there is one thing more I want you to tell me, Henry. Won't our nice Bishop be the proper person to — marry us?"

"Certainly, dearest."

"Well, I should like to write to him myself, and tell him about our engagement, and ask him."

"Ask him to marry us?"

"Yes."

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"I wish you would. He will like it. And so shall I. He is the best of men and Bishops."

"Does n't Bishop mean overseer?" the girl asked, playing with his watch-chain.

"Oh, you learned little lady! I believe you are a Girton girl in disguise, after all. Yes, 'episcopos,' the Greek word for bishop, means overseer. How did you find that out?"

"I sha'n't tell you. I have been improving my mind a great deal lately. I really do believe I shall do the Duchess business very well," she laughed. Then more gravely, "I shall ask the Bishop to oversee *me* a little: to tell me things, and to help me to be good. I'm going to write him such a nice letter. And I sha'n't show it to your Grace."

"Your correspondence is sacred, little lady. I'm glad you are going to have Chapman for your spiritual pastor and master. You'll get nothing but good from him."

"And now we really must do our letters, Henry. I have to write to Holmhurst, and to the Bishop, and I *must* send a line to poor Lilian, — she will be so glad, — and I suppose I ought to send one to Aunt Mary."

"Yes. But I must write to your uncle, so you need not. Could n't you write your letters here? I hate parting with you."

"Don't be so silly, Henry," she said, springing down with a laugh. "No, I can't even stop in this room and write them. I know I should never get through them. Now, should I? Nor you yours! Come, Hector!"

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"Perhaps not," he sighed. And, walking with his arm round her to the door, he kissed her and opened it, and let her and the dog out.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SO, thanks to Kitty's sagacious flight from her lover, the letters were duly written, and the Duke's missive was awaiting John Silverton next morning when he came in from his ride in the Park to breakfast. He always partakes of that meal alone, if possible. He likes to devote his fresh matutinal energies to arranging the day's campaign; for his every day is a campaign. That high finance, of which he is a king, is in truth a perpetual conflict, — the bitterest and most ruthless form of the universal struggle for existence. The spoils are to the victor. The weakest go to the wall. No quarter is given. None is expected. Blasted reputations, broken lives, blighted homes, are the ordinary incidents of that never-ceasing battle. The fittest survive, and prove their fitness by surviving. "The wealthiest men among us are the best." A cool head, clear eyes, nerves of iron, and a will of adamant are the titles for leadership in the armies of Mammon. And John Silverton possesses these in amplest measure. There is something Napoleonic about the man. But he disdains the lying, the forgery, the thousand-fold fraud which the revolutionary Cæsar so unscrupulously employed.

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No one can accuse him of disregarding the moralities of finance, as the City understands them. His word is his bond. He never stoops to an advantage which to his world seems unfair. And if, when he gets a rival into a tight place, he keeps that rival there, — as he certainly does, — this is merely a piece of prudent strategy. The rival would assuredly act in precisely the same way, if the situation were reversed. The man's iron-grey hair, keen, concupiscent face, close-shaven except for a well-trimmed black moustache, sharp, small, deep-set hazel eyes, singularly square chin, sinewy frame, and strongly marked features, plainly proclaim him what he is: courageous, veracious, and edacious — but self-controlled. A keen judge of men once called him a new incarnation of Vautrin. Such of the company as knew who Vautrin was, were considerably astonished. And certainly the suggested comparison between a felon, and a financier whose praise is in all the Churches of Mammon, might, at the first blush, well seem an outrage on humanity, or, at all events, on gigmanity. I suppose it was meant that the life philosophy of the Silver King and of the prince of convicts was pretty much the same: that, however different their environment and career, their view of this world, and of the next, did not materially differ. And, indeed, I can imagine John Silverton — he knows the French language and a certain department of French literature very well — saying, in a moment of candour, which is not unfrequent with him, “*Savez-vous comment on fait son chemin ici ?*”

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Par l'éclat du génie ou par l'adresse de la corruption. Il faut entrer dans cette masse d'hommes comme un boulet de canon, ou s'y glisser comme une peste. L'honnêteté ne sert à rien. Pour s'enrichir, il s'agit ici de jouer de grand coups : autrement, on carotte, et votre serviteur ! Voilà la vie telle qu'elle est. Ça n'est plus beau que la cuisine ; ça pue tout autant, et il faut se salir les mains si l'on veut fricoter ; sachez seulement vous bien débarbouiller : là est toute la morale de notre époque. Croyez-vous que je blâme le monde ? Du tout. Il a toujours été ainsi. Les moralistes ne le changeront jamais. Je ne vous parle pas de ces pauvres ilotes qui partout font la besogne sans être jamais récompensés de leurs travaux et que je nomme la confrérie des savates du bon Dieu. Certes, là est la vertu dans toute la fleur de sa bêtise, mais là est la misère. Je vois d'ici la grimace de ces braves gens si Dieu nous faisait la mauvaise plaisanterie de s'absenter au jugement dernier.”¹

¹ For the benefit of those of my readers who have not had, or have not profited by, Mr. Silverton's opportunities of acquiring a mastery of the French tongue, I subjoin an English version of this extremely characteristic, and properly untranslatable bit of Balzac.

“Do you know how a man makes his way here ? By dazzling genius or adroit corruption. You must tear a way through the mass of men like a cannon-ball, or steal among them like a pestilence. Mere honesty is no good at all. If you want to get rich, you must play for big stakes. If you don't, there is nothing else for it but low playing — which don't suit yours truly. There you have life — as it is. Not nice, is it ? No more is cookery. That stinks in your nostrils, too, does n't it ? But you must n't mind soiling your hands if you want your grub. Only take jolly good care to wash them well afterwards. And there you have the whole morality of this age of ours. Do you suppose I blame the world

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On that Monday morning Mr. Silverton's letters had, as usual, been placed on his breakfast-table by his butler, Perkins. And on the top of the pile that judicious domestic had laid the Duke of Shropshire's, whose handwriting was perfectly well known to him. It caught his master's eye at once.

"What is the Duke writing to me about, I wonder," he said to himself.

He proceeded to resolve the question by the ordinary process of opening the letter and reading it. He had long acquired the art—so necessary in his life—of keeping his face under perfect control. But it was evident to the intelligent Perkins, from the flare in his eyes, that the ducal communication interested him deeply.

"Send to inquire whether her ladyship is awake," he said.

"Yes, sir," Perkins replied, leaving the room in his usual noiseless way.

"What's up?" he said to himself, as soon as he had closed the door; and he gave the lowest of possible whistles. It was so low as to be inaudible half a dozen yards off; but it afforded the worthy man's feelings that relief which he would not accord to them by speech. He in-

for being what it is? By no manner of means. It has always been like that. And moralists will never make it different. I don't speak to you of those poor helots who, all the world over, work away without getting any recompense for their toil. I call them Almighty God's ragamuffins. There you have virtue in the full bloom of its idiocy—yes, and destitution with it. I can see from here the face those good fellows will make if God should play them the bad joke of stopping away from the Last Judgment."

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dulged in no gossip, though he heard a great deal, and much of it did not redound to the discretion of Lady Mary. He had his own opinion of her ladyship; but wild horses would not have drawn it from him.

"What's up?" he said to himself again. His eye had caught the word "Confidential" at the head of the ducal letter. "It won't be 'confidential' long," he thought. He knew the world well enough to be aware that our most private performances have a way of suddenly becoming most public: that the most hidden things we do, in secret chambers, are quite unexpectedly proclaimed upon the housetops — or, what is far worse, in the newspapers.

Thus meditating, he despatched Charles, the third footman, to obtain the desired information concerning Lady Mary's slumbers from Mademoiselle Annette. In a few minutes he returned and informed his master that her ladyship was awake, and had left her bedroom, and was taking her chocolate in her own sitting-room.

"Very well," said Silverton, who had the letter still in his hand, and seemed deep in thought, "I shall be back in a few minutes. Keep the things hot."

He went upstairs to the suite of rooms dedicated to his wife's use. He seldom visited them, but he greatly admired them. They were hung with the richest rose-coloured damask, in panels of white enamel, and furnished in white and gold, picked out with tender green as of early spring leaves. A French artist of great repute had

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painted the ceilings with scenes from the legend of Venus, and pieces of the most exquisite old Dresden china were artistically disposed here and there. Silverton had given Lady Mary *carte blanche* for the equipment of this suite, and had paid a portentous bill without a murmur. Very diffident of his own taste in such matters, he had the profoundest confidence in his wife's, of which he had exhibited this proof, among others, that he had caused the decoration of her rooms to be faithfully reproduced in the bijou residence — not a mile off — which enshrined the piquant face and dainty figure of Mademoiselle Bergerac of the Frivolity Theatre.

Lady Mary started when her husband appeared. She had felt restless, and had left her bed, throwing a loose gown over her night-dress, and thrusting her feet into the daintiest of slippers, and had gone into her sitting-room. There she sat, sipping her chocolate, nursing her King Charles, and glancing at the *Morning Post*, when her husband's unexpected apparition startled her. He held the letter still in his hand. And she at once recognised her cousin Henry's handwriting. The door communicating with her bedroom, where Mademoiselle Annette was occupied, was open. Silverton closed it. Then, turning his inscrutable countenance towards her, he said:

"Here's a letter from Shropshire which you must read at once. It does n't altogether take me by surprise. I keep my eyes open, though my mouth is shut."

Lady's Mary's face became ashen. Her over-

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full underlip dropped. Her heart almost stopped beating. A succession of thoughts passed through her mind with the speed of lightning. How much did her husband know? How much did he care? She had told Savile he did n't care; but perhaps he did. After all, she was his property; and he was very tenacious of proprietary rights. Most certainly, he would n't like a scandal about her. And she was well aware that of late she had been far less circumspect than usual. Savile had cautioned her about the fate of a woman without discretion. And she had been indiscreet, most indiscreet, in her mad efforts to keep him. He was n't worth it. And she had lost him after all. Had the Duke heard something very compromising? And had he written to tell John Silverton? Impossible! That was n't his way; he was too chivalrous for that. Perhaps Silverton had written to him as the head of her house; and that was his answer in her husband's hand. A sentence of condemnation very likely, — for the Duke could n't lie, — of utter ruin. What a fool she had been! And how she pitied herself! She had, in that brief moment, an experience akin to a drowning man's. The whole of her *liaison* with Savile was present to her. Transports, recriminations, love, jealousy, fear, hate, chased one another through her fevered brain. All heaven and all hell seemed to be concentrated in that brief point of time — which was like a limitless eternity.

At last, by a supreme effort, she mastered herself sufficiently to say, "What is it? I have a

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bad headache this morning. I'm too stupid for anything."

"I thought you seemed queer," he replied. "What is it? It is this," holding out the letter. He paused; a cold shiver ran through her.

"It is this," he continued, putting the letter into her hand, and allowing a smile to play upon his lips, "that you are not only the most beautiful woman in London, but the cleverest. Shropshire writes to ask my consent to his marriage with Kitty. And I know you have brought it about. I am prouder of you than ever, Mary."

The anguish of that terrible suspense was over. The bitterness of death — of social death, far more dreaded by her than corporal — was passed. The revulsion was almost too great. But the returning colour to her cheeks, and the new light in her eyes, justified her husband's compliment to her physical charms. He stooped down and kissed her forehead.

"The news has cured you," he observed.

She offered him her lips.

"I knew you would be pleased," she said in her calm, even voice, "if it came about." Her usual instinct of keeping as near the truth as possible, shaped her words.

"Pleased? I should think I am! And Kitty must be a clever little kiddie to have played her cards so well."

"There is a great deal more in that child than one would suspect. I *am* glad," as indeed she was — at the groundlessness of her mortal terror.

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How Kitty's marriage would affect *her*, she had not had time to consider.

"How stupid I am!" she continued. "No doubt there is a letter from her for me." And she turned over the pile that lay before her. "Yes, here it is." She first read it through to herself, and then gave it to her husband.

BRACY CASTLE, Sunday.

DEAR AUNT MARY,— You have been wanting to get me married, you know. Well, I'm engaged to Henry. It came about this afternoon. He was driving me in his cart, and the horse bolted, and we were both thrown out, but not a bit hurt; and I found out how much he cares for me; and he found out how much I care for him. I am supremely happy; and, in a way, I owe my happiness to you. I sha'n't forget that, whatever else I forget. Please give Uncle John, who has always been very good to me, my very best love — no, not my very best, the next to that: I keep the very best for Henry. I won't write to him, as Henry is writing, and I am much pressed for time. Much love to yourself,

Your very affectionate,
KITTY.

"A very satisfactory letter, indeed," said Silverton.

"Yes," assented his wife, who read between the lines. It was the best she could expect. Perhaps it was as well, after all, that her scheme for Kitty's marriage had n't come off. It would n't have worked. The girl was n't the little fool she had thought. But she did not communicate these reflections to her husband. She merely remarked, —

"Kitty will suit Henry very well. He likes

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that style of girl. And her fortune will come in for younger children."

"They will have a dozen," he said. "I would lay long odds on that event. By the way, Mary, is n't it a pity we've only two?"

"They are two more than you deserve," she answered with gracious mockery; and he wondered how much she knew of his private affairs; "and I have no wish to be converted into a British matron. But we'll talk about that at a more convenient season. Now go to your breakfast and to the City. You will have to spend a small fortune over Kitty's wedding."

"I don't care how much I spend. I give you *carte blanche*."

"A speech worthy of the Silver King," she laughed. "Long live your Majesty!" and she kissed her hand to him.

He was departing in high good humour. He rather liked his City title, though he had refused a peerage; it suited him better to be in the House of Commons. She called him back. She was looking at the Duke's letter which she had not, as yet, read.

"Do you see," she said, "that Henry wants the wedding to be at the end of this month?"

"Well, why should n't it be? The sooner, the better. Don't let it be delayed for an unnecessary day. I would have given a hundred thousand pounds to bring this about," he added thoughtfully.

"Then you can write me a cheque for that amount as my commission," she laughed.

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"I will make a post-nuptial settlement of it."

"I was only joking."

"I was n't. I never joke about money."

"By the way," she said, "this means our putting off our Italian journey."

"That can be very well postponed, as far as I am concerned," he replied. "Do you mind?"

"Not a bit under the circumstances," which she did n't, for Algy Vane, promoted to be *cavaliere servente*, *vice* Philip Savile, absent without leave, could not come.

The clock struck nine.

"By Jove," he said, "how the time has gone. I am half an hour late. I must either miss my breakfast or keep a Board of Directors waiting. They must wait. They can't do without me; and I can't do without my breakfast. Napoleon was right: 'C'est le ventre qui fait mouvoir le monde.' Besides, they will condone my unpunctuality when I tell them it was caused by my niece's engagement to Shropshire. Give me another kiss, Mary; I never saw you looking more handsome."

She did not deny him; she too was in high good humour.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

NEXT morning they came up from Bracy Castle; — they all felt there was not much time to be lost; — and in the train the Duke handed Kitty the *Morning Post*, which informed the

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civilised world that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, between the Duke of Shropshire and Kitty, only daughter of the late Mr. James Karsdale, of Alston Grange near Liverpool.

"How nice it looks!" Kitty said.

This was not the view taken of it by some distinguished members of London society. Many an aristocratic mother almost tore her dyed hair with vexation that the great prize in the matrimonial lottery had been carried off by this little *parvenue* whom no one had ever heard of until three months ago. Many a titled *débutante*, fondly hopeful that the Duke of Shropshire's heart had been ensnared in the golden mesh of her tresses, mourned for fully an hour over the loss of the strawberry leaves which would have so well suited her own lovely head. To be sure, Kitty Karsdale was a great catch. But that could have had little to do with it, the women agreed. The Duke was so rich that even half a million would not much signify to him. No. It was merely one instance more of man's utter perversity. Among men, for the most part, the judgment was different. "A nice, fresh, unsophisticated little girl — none of your London ball-room hacks — who will make Shropshire a thoroughly good wife, and, by Jove, he deserves one, for he's as good a specimen as there is going of an English gentleman; and although he don't want her money, it won't come amiss to him. Does half a million ever come amiss to anybody?" Such was the general

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male verdict. But there were dissentients. Mr. Lionel Twistleton was one of them. He entertained a strong opinion that the young heiress would have done far better had she bestowed her hand and her fortune upon his accomplished self.

"A sly dog, Shropshire," he observed to a friend at the Bachelors' Club. "There he's been going on all these years, having his fling on the quiet, like the rest of the world, I don't doubt, for all his sedate airs; and now, at fifty, he marries the prettiest girl in London with half a million. We young fellows have no chance by the side of these middle-aged men. Look at the Bergerac. She pretends to be in love with Silverton, who is old enough to be her father, and sticks to him as closely as a wife."

"Don't say 'as closely as,'" laughed his friend, "say 'more closely than.' But the Bergerac, at all events, is strictly preserved; no poaching there, dear boy!"

That fact Mr. Lionel Twistleton had realised, having been grievously snubbed by the bewitching *danseuse* when venturing to declare to her, in his best French,—which, indeed, was very good,—how greatly he was fascinated by her charms. Whether she was in love with the Silver King, I do not undertake to say. She certainly behaved as if she was, which was enough to satisfy the requirements of that potentate. Under the exterior of a French Duchess of the Second Empire, she had the heart of a French peasant. She knew perfectly well that her *beauté du diable* could not last many years, and made hay while

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that sun shone, and prudently harvested it. And in the abundant crop with which the liberality of the Silver King provided her, there was a solid satisfaction not to be jeopardised for any shadowy sentiment.

Liberality, indeed, was one of the notes of John Silverton's character. He knew how to spend money just as well as he knew how to make it. He spent it freely when pleasure, or ambition, or interest, was involved. And all were involved in Kitty's marriage. He had a real liking for the girl; partly because she was his niece; partly because of her evident affection for him; partly because of her freshness and prettiness: and it was a pleasure to him to make of her wedding a royal function. Then again, next to his own union with Lady Mary, his niece's marriage with the head of the house of Bracy was the greatest social success of his life; and it would gratify his ambition to talk of "my niece the Duchess of Shropshire." Moreover, this fresh tie between himself and the noblest families in the British peerage would add much to his prestige in the world of finance; and he knew well — no one better — how much it was to his interest to extend his prestige.

The respectful effusion with which he welcomed Kitty back to 100, Grosvenor Square, somewhat amused the girl. But she soon realised that for the world in general, as for her uncle, the Duchess elect was a very different person from Kitty Karsdale. Congratulations, as deferential as warm, poured in on every side.

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"I had no idea, Henry," she laughed, "that I was so highly esteemed a person."

"You see, little lady," he said banteringly, "that the general verdict ratifies my choice."

"Would n't it have done that wherever your choice had fallen?" she asked.

"Yes, within certain limits. You judge these things —" pointing to a stack of presents and a pile of letters which she had brought to show him — "at their proper value, dearest."

"By the way," she said, "is n't it odd that I have never heard from the Bishop in answer to my letter?"

"No; the very Sunday you wrote, he was summoned to Vienna by the illness of his brother. To-day's *Morning Post* announces his return. We are sure to see him soon."

They were talking in the library of Shropshire House, and at that moment Lady Helena appeared with the tidings that the prelate was in the morning-room.

"Oh, I must go to see him at once," Kitty cried. "Are n't you coming, Henry?"

"No; you shall have your tête-à-tête with your spiritual pastor and master alone. And when you can spare him, ask him to come to me here. He knows his way about this house."

So Kitty departed for her talk with her dear Bishop, and it was a long one. Then he made his appearance in the library.

"Duke," he said, "you don't require to be told that you are very fortunate; but perhaps you are more fortunate than you know. The

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young lady you are going to marry is as good as they make 'em."

"Slang from episcopal lips means a great deal," the Duke replied, laughing.

"Yes. I congratulate you most heartily, as an old friend, and as your Bishop. And, to make up for the slang, take the following verses which have been running in my head ever since I heard the news, —

" 'He is the half part of a blessèd man
Left to be finished by such as she :
And she, a fair divided excellence,
Whose fulness of perfection lies in him.' "

"It's but straight to tell you that these lines have done double duty. I quoted them just now to Miss Karsdale. They were new to her, and she thought them exquisite."

"So they are," said the Duke. "God grant they may be prophetic."

On the next Sunday the Duke, with Lady Helena and Kitty, went down to The Cedars to luncheon. He had purposely chosen that day in order to meet Dr. Williamson, for whom he had a high regard, and of whose health he had heard disquieting rumours.

It was a bright party at luncheon, when the talk naturally ran upon the Duke and Kitty's immediate plans. They were to be married on the last day in July. They were going for a short time to Bracy Castle, — Kitty had a fancy to begin her new life in her future home, — then they would travel on the Continent, and in the

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course of their wanderings would stay for some weeks at Göttelstein, the old Schloss of the Kleist family, which the Baron had pressinglly placed at their disposal. And they would get back to the Castle for Christmas, at which season the Duke always had a great gathering there of the Bracy kith and kin.

"You and Miss Liddell must come too," he said to Mrs. Tremenheere.

The old lady gladly promised to come. She was charmed that her adored Duke was going to marry, and that his choice had fallen upon the bright and fresh young girl whom she had come to like heartily.

Williamson shared her satisfaction. Kitty pleased him extremely. Lilian was delighted at her friend's good fortune in winning the love of such a man, and was full of happy auguries for the future of both. After luncheon she said :

"Will you come into my sitting-room, Kitty, and let us have a little cosy talk together?"

"That is just what I was going to propose," Kitty replied.

So the two girls departed together for a tête-à-tête, as did Lady Helena and Mrs. Tremenheere, leaving the Duke and Dr. Williamson to their coffee and cigarettes.

The Duke had noticed that Williamson looked pale and worn, and asked him about his health.

"It is n't so good as I could wish."

"Overwork?"

"Partly; but I'm afraid there is organic mischief."

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The Duke looked grave. "You must give yourself every chance, Williamson," he said at length. "Yours is a very precious life, not only to Mrs. Williamson, but to a great many of us."

"I shall join my wife early next month at Davos Platz, and take eight or ten weeks' holiday. Humanly speaking, I shall outlive her, for her sands of life are fast running out. But I can't hope for longevity. I'm not sure that I greatly desire it: although I should like to live long enough to pay that debt which every man owes to his profession, by embodying some of the results of my experience and research in a treatise on *First Principles in Medicine*. But I have known so many men who seem to have lived too long! I think I should like best to go 'in the prime of life, with vigour undimmed, with unspent mind.'"

"It is a melancholy doctrine," said the Duke.

"It is not a doctrine to preach to you, Duke, especially just now. All men cannot receive it. You can't—and ought n't. I earnestly hope and believe that many years of happiness lie before you and that charming young lady whom a kind Providence seems to have expressly created for you."

"Thanks, Williamson, many thanks. You are most kind. And now tell me about Miss Liddell, in whom I am deeply interested, and who is my future wife's greatest friend. I am glad to see that she has an air of convalescence about her."

"She will do very well. But she and Mrs.

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Tremenheere must get away to the sea; and she should keep up her riding."

"They shall have that little place of mine on the East Coast. I'll send servants and riding-horses and a pony carriage and everything. Of course they will be altogether my guests there. And I'll ask them to take in one of Bideford's daughters who is ordered sea air, — a very nice girl. She and Miss Liddell are sure to be friends; and they might ride together."

"A capital arrangement, Duke! Lady Eva Chatteris is a patient of mine, and it is just what she wants. You are an earthly Providence. By the way, Lord Bideford is an uncle of Savile's, is n't he?"

"A great-uncle."

So the two men, who had been sitting on the lawn, walked towards the house, where Mrs. Tremeneheere and Lady Helena joined them, and the Duke communicated to the grateful and gratified old lady his plans for her visiting the sea with Lilian. Then Lady Helena thought it time to be going, and Kitty was summoned from her prolonged conference with her friend, and the three got into their carriage and drove away.

They were rather silent, and the Duke said, in his bantering way, to Kitty, "How grave you are, little lady; are you unhappy?"

"Unhappy! How could I be?" she replied, turning to him her face which, at the sound of his voice, was lit up with its usual bright smile. "But I was thinking about Lilian."

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"You are grave too, Helena," the Duke remarked.

"Well, I was also thinking of Lilian. Mrs. Tremeneere has been talking to me about her. But do you know that *you* look a little grave, Henry?"

"Well, I was n't thinking about Lilian, at all events. I'm sorry that girl is such a grave theme of meditation. Dr. Williamson gave me a very good account of her."

Neither of the women answered, and the Duke, with ready tact, changed the conversation. He asked Kitty about her wedding dress, and that important subject occupied them until they reached Shropshire House.

Then she said, "Henry, are n't you writing to the Baron?"

"I have written; the letter is in the library."

"May I add a postscript?"

"Yes, do. Come along!"

When they were in the library, she said: "Before I write my postscript to the Baron, I want to tell you about Lilian. It's very difficult, though: I could not speak before Helena."

"What is it, dearest?" he said, taking her little hand and kissing it, and still holding it in his, as if to help her.

"Well, you know I wanted Lilian to be one of my bridesmaids, my chief bridesmaid. She said she could n't, and I asked her why. She said her health would be a sufficient excuse, and had better be given as the reason to anyone who wanted to know. Then I asked her to tell me

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the real reason ; she did n't like to, but she felt she must ; she is so very truthful, you know. And it seems — oh, it's so horrid, that I don't like talking about it, even to you ! — that she was very much in love with Philip Savile and he with her ; and that the day he left the Castle they arrived at an understanding, and were engaged, and very happy, and that at the very moment, Aunt Mary came between them and made a horrible scene and said — and said that he belonged to her, and carried him off. Oh, it's disgusting !" said the girl, with flaming cheeks. " I can't tell you now all that Lilian told me, and I'm not quite sure whether I understood it all, for — for I'm very ignorant of — of — some things. I'll tell you when we are married. Somehow it does n't seem very nice to talk even to you — *you* — " and she kissed him — " about such things till then."

" Sweetest, there are some things which it is better for a young girl not to know very much about, till it is her duty to know them. So we will let this conversation stand over, as you wish. It won't be for long, happily. I think I understand. Poor Lilian ! Another young life " — and his face grew stern — " that Mary has tried to sacrifice to — to — She's far worse than many criminals I've sentenced to penal servitude at Quarter Sessions. Well, we won't talk more about it, darling," and he looked with ineffable tenderness into the childish, innocent face upturned to his own. " I hope you are not very disappointed at not having Lilian for a bridesmaid."

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"I *am* disappointed; but she feels she can't meet Aunt Mary after what has happened."

"No."

"But I'm sure it will all come right between her and Philip Savile. The Baron—he was over head and ears himself in love with Lilian—has been so noble and so unselfish. He has rescued Philip from Aunt Mary's clutches, and carried him safely away; and Dr. Williamson, who is Philip's great friend, you know, helped."

"Helped to carry Savile safely away?" laughed the Duke.

"Don't be silly, Henry! Helped to deliver him from Aunt Mary. Poor Lilian! She is awfully in love with him still,—I can see that,—although she says she feels as if she could never marry him. I expect she will though. But she's much too good for him. She is

" 'A perfect woman nobly planned
To guide, to counsel and command.' "

"She'll guide, counsel, and command Savile, if they ever do come together," said the Duke. "And a good thing too: the best thing that could happen to him. But I'm surprised at your outburst of Wordsworth."

"Oh, Lilian is very fond of him, and I tried to read him, and nearly yawned my head off over *The Excursion*. And then she told me to get a little volume of Selections, and they are charming."

"So are you, little lady; and you get more charming every day, which I should have thought impossible. Now you must write your post-

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script to Kleist, if the letter is to go to-day by the special post."

So she wrote, —

"I've had a long talk with Lilian to-day, and I can't tell you how much I respect and admire you, Baron. Henry and I will love to stay at Schloss Göttelstein, and you and Sir Philip must come and visit us there. My kindest regards to him, please, though I'm not quite sure that I ought to send them. But if he can only make Lilian happy, he will have no faster friend than K. K.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SO Kitty's great day came and went. "How odd it all is to look back upon!" she said to her husband, as they caught sight of Bracy Castle from the train in the quiet, cool evening, "and how delightful to think of that dear old place as my home!"

It was lit up by the setting sun; her husband told her it was smiling a welcome to the bride.

"But how stupid it is of me," she continued: "I don't in the least realise that I am a Duchess. Louise called me '*Votre Grandeur*.'"

"As though you were an Archbishop," he laughed. "You don't in the least resemble one."

"I *should* look funny in a mitre," she laughed in return.

"Tell her to call you Madame la Duchesse."

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"Votre Grandeur!" the girl laughed again.

"Well, you are not very grand, little lady; but you are certainly the prettiest bride I have ever seen."

"I'm so glad I please you so much, Henry. I'm going to do everything I can to please you as your wife. You must tell me in a week's time whether I have made a good beginning. Don't forget."

The happy days and nights sped swiftly away, and the week they were to spend at the Castle was gone, even as a dream when one awaketh. They were again in the train, and now were rapidly leaving the old place behind them, as they travelled towards Dover.

"Well," said Kitty, looking at her husband, "have you remembered?"

"Yes, I have," he replied, taking her little hand, and looking tenderly into her great brown inquiring eyes. "But I can't do what you asked me."

"Not tell me how I have pleased you since we were in the train together a week ago?"

"No, sweetest, it is impossible; no words are adequate."

"What nice things you say, Henry; and you don't know how I like hearing them; and I don't think you know what a deep joy it is to a girl to feel that she has given herself entirely to the man she loves; that she is his, wholly and altogether his. I'm glad we began our married life together there," she went on, thinking aloud, as she often did when she was alone with her

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husband, and looking at the Castle, now dimly visible on the horizon. "Our life. *Ours!* How delightful the word is! It is sweet to think that we shall live there always. And I should like to die there."

Her husband thought of the verses

"Oh, why should Love, like men in drinking songs,
Spice his fair banquet with the dust of death?"

But to his wife he only said in the deep kind tones which were so dear to her, "Your thoughts are mine too, Kitty."

The next day found them in Paris, and the bright city was an unceasing joy to the girl. She took her husband to visit the convent at Fontainebleau where she had been at school, and where she was received by the good sisters with the delight excited by seeing an old and favourite pupil, and with the deference due to the Duchess of Shropshire. She enjoyed a long talk with her dear Sœur Angélique, while the Duke discoursed with the Reverend Mother. Then they were taken to see the Chapel, — the heart's joy of the community.

"It is very bright and pretty," the Duke said, adding to himself, "and very French: how like grown-up children these religious women are; and how well it is for them to be so!"

"Yes," the Reverend Mother sighed; "we try to make it as bright and pretty as we can; but we want a new high altar very badly: we have designs for it, but it will cost ten thousand francs," and her voice had a melancholy cadence.

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"I should like to see them," he said.

She was only too glad to show them; and thought what good there was in these English Protestant *grands seigneurs*; how different from the ignoble *libres penseurs* who bore rule in her own country.

"It is a charming design, Reverend Mother," the Duke remarked. "Could you oblige me with pen and ink?"

She wonderingly complied with his request, and wondered still more when he employed those materials to write a cheque for £500.

"I have made our offering a little more than the sum you mentioned, Reverend Mother; estimates are always exceeded, you know. And when the altar is set up, would you have a Mass said sometimes at it for the Duchess?"

"Every week," she replied with fervour, "and for you too, M. le Duc, and for the children whom the good God will surely send you."

The Duke warmly pressed the good woman's hand and departed with the blushing Kitty.

"Those women are of the excellent of the earth," he said; "it is a privilege to have spent half an hour with them."

Their continental tour was a long delight to the girl, who had never been abroad before except at school. It was a long delight, too, to her husband. His wife had much to learn; but she had nothing to unlearn. The solid basis of an education had been given her by the good sisters, and it was easy for him to build upon it. Her quick mind readily received all he told her, and

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her excellent memory easily retained it. So they journeyed on from place to place. And every day he realised more fully the wisdom of his choice. His wide reading, his ripe experience, his sound judgment, his unfailing tact, were utilised by his love in forming her. "So sways she level in her husband's heart," he murmured one day.

"What's that you are saying about my husband's heart, Henry?" she asked with her usual bright smile, as the words fell upon her quick ear.

He took down a volume of Shakespeare, — part of his travelling library, — and showed her the passage, —

"Let still the woman take
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart."

"What a wise man he was," she said. "'Sways she level,' like a pendulum, you know. Tell me, were there clocks in Shakespeare's time?"

They were at Nuremberg then, — dear delightful Nuremberg, marred, indeed, by the vulgar touch of what is called modern progress since the present writer first saw it, — more years ago than he cares to remember, — but still the loveliest of existing cities. So he told her all about the invention of clocks, and added, by way of corollary, that watches were first made in that very Nuremberg, and were originally called Nuremberg eggs.

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"Dear me," the girl laughed, "what a prodigy of learning I am becoming! It's a wonder that one small head can carry it all."

"You are quoting Goldsmith," he said in the same tone.

"No, indeed, I never read a line of him!"

"And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew."

It is in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*."

"Well," replied Kitty, "it is only that two great minds have hit upon the same thought. But we must read *The Deserted Village* together."

Kitty was charmed with Nuremberg; and her husband was charmed by her vivid appreciation of its singular picturesqueness. Its well nigh four miles of walls, crowned by their diadem of towers, its wide moat with the spanning draw-bridges, its embattled gateways, its red roofs so wonderfully grouped, its quaint old bridges across the Pegnitz, which ran close to their hotel, its beautiful fountains, its exquisite churches, — little mutilated though converted to the service of a religion other than their builders', — all made a deep impression on her mind. It was her delight to ascend the Kaiserburg, and, gazing down, to hear from her husband of the romantic history of the old imperial free town, and of the stirring scenes which had been enacted there: of its warriors and merchant princes, its smiths and armourers, its artists and sweet singers, and above all of Albert Durer, at once painter, sculptor, engraver, mathemati-

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cian, engineer, and author, — the Michael Angelo of the North.

"I shall be so sorry to leave it all," she sighed the day before their departure; "and especially that dear river which flows just under our rooms."

"Be comforted, dearest Kitty," her husband said with a smile, "we sha'n't leave the river; we shall ride by it a bit of the way to Schloss Göttestein."

For they had arranged to ride thither from Nuremberg, and Adolf von Kleist had sent them saddle-horses from his own stables.

"The country is really well worth seeing," the Duke had said to Kitty. "And that is the only way to see it. Railways have done much for us, — and they have taken much from us."

Kitty was delighted. And for four bright days they rode through that lovely land, with its dark green woods, watered by crystalline streams, its emerald meadows, dotted with the old-world villages, its rocky hills, crowned by ruined castles; halting to lunch, or dine and sleep, at primitive little inns, where the simple folk, somewhat scared by the reports of their grandeur brought by their domestics, were soon reassured by the simple urbanity of the great English lord who spoke their language so well, and by the bright smiles of content with which his pretty wife eked out her scanty German.

"Why," said Kitty to her husband, "this is like a perpetual picnic; it is most delightful!"

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"I'm not sure that Mademoiselle Louise finds it so," he laughed; "but I've told Giorgi to take special care of her." And Giorgi, who was the courier, did his best to comply with this injunction, being perfectly well aware that what might be good enough for her Grace, was not necessarily good enough for her Grace's maid.

"Do let us make another riding-tour somewhere, Henry."

"Yes, when we get to Italy we will ride through that exquisite Umbrian country."

"What funny little beds these are! You should have seen Louise's face when she found that the sheets were buttoned on to those thick wadded coverlets! Oh, I'm so sleepy!"

And in two minutes the girl's regular breathing proved that she had spoken correctly.

On the fourth day, greatly to the delight of their domestics, they reached Schloss Göttelstein, a vast pile overlooking a lovely little river which flowed out of a dark forest at one extremity of the horizon, and was lost amid huge masses of rock at the other.

Here they found letters, among them one from Lilian for the Duchess.

"I really am quite ashamed of myself," Kitty said, when she saw it. "I'll write to her to-morrow."

But to-morrow brought expeditions to be made, and so did the day after, and the day after that. Indeed, it was not until they had been at Göttelstein a week that she said to her husband: "Henry, it is really too bad of

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me ; I have n't written to Lilian yet. Are n't there some letters you ought to write?"

"Yes," he laughed, "but I don't write them. You see how you have demoralised me."

"Well, then, I will moralise you. Let us both be very virtuous this morning. I will write my letter here ; and do you go into the library to write yours. I never can write with you in the same room. You behave so badly."

"And for how long am I to be banished?"

"Oh, only for half an hour. And if you are without me for a bit, you will enjoy my society the more."

"Impossible! But you shall be obeyed. You look like the incarnation of Duty, who, as you have read in your Wordsworth, is a 'stern lawgiver.'"

"I'm not sure that I have. Is it in my little book?"

"Listen!" he said,—

“ ‘ Stern lawgiver ! yet dost thou wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace !
Nor is there anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face. ’ ”

And he bent down and kissed her blooming cheek.

"Oh, Henry, you are trying by your compliments to make me let you stay here when I ought to be writing my letter!" and she laid her little hands on his broad shoulders, conducted him to the door, gave him her lips to kiss, and fairly shut him out.

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She sighed a little when she found herself alone, but sat down and began her letter.

GÖTTELSTEIN, Tuesday.

Do you think I have forgotten you, my sweet Lilian, because I have not written to you all this time? I don't believe you do think it, but if you do, you are quite wrong. You have been so much in my thoughts; and I have been wanting to write to you very badly, but you don't know how difficult it is on one's honeymoon. I wonder how long it will be before you do know? Not long, I hope. Henry is the most delightful travelling companion; and that is precisely the reason why I have n't written to you. Do you know I've just turned him out of the room so that I may write this letter? I have really, really. Could I give you a more convincing proof how much I love you? But you must not think that Henry and I are wasting our time in mere philandering (What a grand phrase! I wonder where I got it). He delights in telling me all about the places we go to: their history, their art,—everything, in fact. And I delight in listening. So it is all delightful. I am not clever like you, dear. Henry says you are all the nine Muses in one. But I'm not stupid—am I, now?—and I've a good memory. Henry says I never forget anything. So to me, as to someone else—I don't know who, but of course you do—love is a liberal education. How egotistical I am! Happy people generally are, are n't they? And I'm so happy, far happier even than I expected, and I expected a great deal. I shall have so much to tell you about our travels when we meet. I must wait till then, for I really have n't time now. I can't even describe to you Schloss Göttelstein—which might have been your home! It is such a picturesque old place; but I should think it must be rather gloomy in winter.

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It was furnished and decorated in the last century by an ancestor of the Baron's in the Louis Quatorze style, very magnificently, but the Baron's mother gave it some English touches. The woods are simply lovely. We get long rides through them daily on the Baron's horses, of which there are some half a dozen — all good. Yesterday afternoon, just when I was going to put on my habit, it simply poured. I said to Henry, "What are you going to do about your exercise?" He always makes a point of getting it, whatever the weather is. He said, "Oh, if the weather does n't clear up, I'll get it alone." I said, "Your Grace will do nothing of the sort, you've got a little encumbrance, called a wife, who is n't to be shaken off so easily." He laughed and — well, never mind. So we played battledore and shuttlecock for half an hour in one of the corridors, hoping it would clear up. But it did n't. Then I said, "Do let's go for a scamper on our horses in the rain; it will be such fun!" He said, "Come along then; it can't do you any harm if you keep warm, and change when you come in." So I put on my old habit, which Louise had had the good sense to bring, and we had such a jolly ride for about two hours, going as hard as we could; and then we came in dripping like drowned rats, but as fresh as daisies, and bathed, and dressed, and dined with such an appetite! I believe they all think us half mad. The other day our courier Giorgi told Henry's man, who told my maid, who told me, that his Grace was like a school-boy out for a holiday. I told Henry, who laughed, and said, "He's just hit it."

I stopped writing because a letter was brought to me from the Baron, who is at a hunting box of his some fifteen miles off with Philip Savile. He says that they will ride over to dine and sleep, and that he has sent a groom on with this note and their things. I must put aside my writing now, and go and tell Henry.

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To-morrow I will finish my letter, and then I shall be able to give you news of the Baron — and of some one else. I see the colour mounting to your cheeks, my lovely Lilian.

Wednesday.

The three men have gone out shooting, so I am free to talk to you, dearest. The Baron and Philip Savile arrived at seven o'clock yesterday; and at eight o'clock we were seated at dinner. It was funny that Henry and I, the Baron's guests, should be entertaining him in his own house. His hospitality to us is simply boundless. Fancy, he sent to Paris for a *chef* before we arrived. He thought we should n't like the German cuisine. So we really have very good cooking. Henry says it is quite excellent, and he knows all about it, though he is content to dine off the simplest things, if necessary. The Baron—but no; I must tell you first about somebody else. Well, *he* is a little thinner, which is not a bad thing, and looks very hard and bronzed. I think there is one line more in his face, just one. And I noticed one grey hair in his moustache. Don't be alarmed, dearest, he is not growing old, and he's as handsome as ever. I do believe he is handsomer; for there is a pathetic look in his eyes which is very becoming. I do feel so sorry for him. I made him come and sit by me in a quiet corner after dinner; and I gave him to understand that I was your great friend, and quite in your confidence. And then he opened out to me. Lilian, I'm sure you are the great love of his life, and the only real one. You have no idea how changed he is. I mean he seems to look at things so differently. He asked me such a lot of questions about you. Don't you think he has done penance enough? This morning I had a long talk with the Baron, who is loud in his praises. They have been living so quietly here, in this out-of-the-way place,

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doing a great deal of sport and a great deal of literary work. He told me Philip has written two articles on German politics, which have been accepted by one of the great English Reviews, he is not sure if it is the *Nineteenth Century* or *The Fortnightly*. He says they are full of important things, and most thoughtfully and admirably written, and that they will make a European reputation for the writer. I know someone who is sure to read them. Now I must finish this letter, for they will soon be back. We shall be here for about three weeks longer; then we are going on to Berlin, where we are to dine with their Imperial Majesties. I suppose we shall be in Italy for eight or nine weeks; and I think we shall be back at the Castle about a week before Christmas. Henry is very pleased that the Cottage suits you so well. He tells me to advise you to stay on there as long as you can, the air is so very tonic. I am delighted you like Eva Chatteris so much. I barely know her. Henry says she is a very nice girl. I will see if we can get the Bidefords to come to us for Christmas, and to bring her and their other daughter. Please tell Mrs. Tremenhoe how much we are both looking forward to having you two with us then. Much love to you both.

Your very affectionate,

K. SHROPSHIRE.

Don't you think my new signature looks nice? I talked it over with Henry. The important question was whether it should be K. Shropshire, or Kitty Shropshire. Henry rather inclined to Kitty, because, I do believe, of a certain Duchess Kitty in the last century who was a great friend of his adored Pope. But I thought K. would be more dignified. You see, one has to rise to the height of your Grace. I wonder whether you care for Pope? I don't, and told Henry so. I tell him everything. He laughed, and said it was all right, and that Pope was a man's poet, not a woman's.

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CHAPTER XL

THE third week in December found Kitty and her husband back at the castle after their long wanderings. Lady Helena had moved to the Dower House. Kitty had begged her to remain with them always, or, if not always, at all events for a time.

"No," was "the sportive, kind reply;" "It will be far best for you, dearest Kitty, to take the reins at once; you will know how to handle them."

The young Duchess did know. How much common sense, steadiness of purpose, and strength of will lay under that girlish exterior was made manifest in a few days.

"Her Grace is all there," the butler observed to the housekeeper, who allowed that the sweet young lady was quite capable of holding her own.

So they settled down to their home life. And the county people hastened to call on the new mistress of Bracy Castle, who soon won all hearts and quelled all jealousies.

"Dear Kitty," said Lilian, who with Mrs. Tremeneere had now come for their promised Christmas visit, "what a perfect little Duchess you are! You are as delightfully vivacious as ever; but you are quite a *grande dame* at the same time."

"It's being so much with Henry," she replied. "Anyone who lives with him gets good manners,

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don't they, Hector? Look at the servants. The butler, Hamilton, is quite a *grand seigneur*, — not in the least pompous, but dignified and distinguished. The valet, Lawson, is like a youthful knight, — so courteous, refined, and attentive. Even the footmen are not in the least flunkyish; they are most respectful, of course, but they have the air of people who respect themselves."

"You *are* in love, Kitty," Lilian laughed.

"I get more so every day," the girl replied. And Lilian sighed.

Kitty was dying to help her friend, and, as was usual in her little difficulties, sought counsel of her husband.

"Don't you think, Henry," she said, "that she really is a little hard on Philip Savile? She has never made any sign to him since the day he left England; she has never even sent him a message, or so much as mentioned his name in her letters to the Baron, to whom she writes every week."

"And he has n't written to her, or sent her any message through Kleist?"

"No; he told me when we were at Göttelstein that he dared not. I had a talk with her in her bedroom this morning, and I told her I thought she was too harsh."

"Well, what did she say?"

"She said she had tried to write to him several times, but that odious scene with Aunt Mary *would* come before her mind — and she simply could n't. 'Oh, when and where shall I forget it?' she cried out in great distress."

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"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'I'll tell you, Lilian; within twenty-four hours after you have married Philip Savile—that's when; and in his arms as his wife—that's where.'"

"Well, Kitty dearest?" laughed the Duke, interrogatively.

"Well, her face grew crimson, and she said I was horrid. And I said she was a prude. And then she had a good cry. She cries so becomingly; very few girls do, you know. And then she kissed me. And we said nothing more about it."

"That was wise. Your speech was silver, but your silence will be golden. I mean," he went on, "that what you said was perfectly true; it was what we used to call at Eton 'the straight tip': it will do her good; and I am glad you said it. But now I should leave her alone. She is very imaginative and very sensitive. She will have to descend from that ideal world of hers and learn a little of life's prose. But it's a hard lesson for her, and she must take time over it. Yes, if I were you, I should leave her alone, unless she broaches the subject to you again. I think Savile is wise in not writing. He must exercise patience, and try, in that way, to make some little reparation to the girl, with whom I do sympathise very strongly. They will meet by and by. His presence will do more—far more—than a ream of letters could."

"I can't help being sorry for Philip Savile," Kitty observed meditatively in her turn: "I do like him so much."

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"Ah! all you women have a soft place in your heart for Philip Savile," the Duke laughed.

"I was rather gone on him myself once, you know," she said, echoing his laugh.

"Have n't I the best reason to know?" he replied merrily.

"How good you were to me that day! I'll tell you something that I never told you before. It was on that day I found out that I was in love with you."

"That is a most interesting chapter in your autobiography, little lady. How did you find it out?"

"Well, because I was so very sorry when you had gone away from Grosvenor Square: everything seemed so dull, and I longed so to be with you again, and kept thinking about you all the time. And you remember the next day I went down to The Cedars. And Lilian said, 'What has come to you, Kitty? How dreamy you look! I believe you are in love!' But I did n't tell her. I laughed and turned it off. I was, though. But my only confidant was Hector. I told you, dear, did n't I, as soon as I came to the Castle?" and she stooped down and caressed the dog. "But, gracious goodness! it is half-past seven! I shall never be dressed for dinner. Louise will be in despair. I'll give you some more autobiography another time."

During the few days immediately preceding Christmas the guests kept coming to the Castle,—some twenty odd of the Bracy kith and kin; the Bishop, without Mrs. Chapman, who was

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in Italy with an invalid son, much to the relief of the younger clergy of the diocese ; Lord and Lady Bideford, with their daughters, the Ladies Eva and Gertrude Chatteris ; and Sir Everard Bassett, who met them in the train and arrived with them. Lilian's quick eyes noticed at once that the Ambassador seemed much taken with her friend Eva, and soon learned from the young lady that she was not indifferent to the admiration and attentions of that attractive diplomatist. "Another happy marriage !" the girl said to herself with a sigh which she could not repress, although she felt ashamed of it.

On Christmas Day the Bishop celebrated the Eucharist, and preached in the lovely little church of Bracy, mainly Norman, but, like the Castle, bearing traces of well nigh every century that has passed away since it was reared. The Castle party made up half the congregation. And Dr. Chapman addressed his discourse specially to them. He is famed as a preacher, and with reason. A fluent and graceful speaker, he knows how to prune his speech and control his thoughts. As the Duke put it epigrammatically : "He is a master of words ; he never lets them master him."

"Yes," replied Sir Everard Bassett, "he has something to say, and he says it as shortly as the matter allows, unlike another famous preacher, the Bishop of——, who has nothing to say, and says it at great length."

On that Christmas morning, he took as his text the words of St. John, "Of His fulness we

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have all received." "His fulness. Whose? Let us go even unto Bethlehem. The fulness of Him Who, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger, is, nevertheless, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His Person. His mission it was to extend, to amplify, the ideals by which we live, — those ideals which mark off human from merely animal existence. How the thoughts of men have widened during those eighteen centuries — no very long chapter in the world's history — that have passed away since the first pilgrimage was made to Bethlehem by the shepherds. How, as age after age has received of His fulness, courage, justice, friendship, patriotism — and still more, reverence, purity, humility — have acquired a larger and deeper meaning; yes; and are still acquiring, for He is present with us always: present in the words which he spake, — they are spirit and they are life; present in the Sacraments and mysteries of His religion; present in the hearts which love Him; present even in the world which knows Him not, although by Him, as the Divine Reason, it was made; present not by material contact, but by spiritual power, — a far more real presence, for spirit, not matter, is the ultimate reality. This is the fulness of which we have all received. It is the great Something-not-ourselves which makes for righteousness in the world. From it grace and truth flow into the whole race of man. From it, surely, emanates that peculiar sentiment, or dominant mood, which we sometimes call modern

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Humanism, and sometimes the Christian temper, and which, whatever name we give it, as it expands the thoughts and enkindles the affections of men, is so cheering a sign of the progress of our race upward and onward. Yes,

“ ‘Light can find its way
To regions furthest from the fount of day.’

In the Babe of Bethlehem there is given us a personality and a character transcending all other personalities and characters, a perfect exemplar, — perfect in the truth of His human nature and the completeness of His human sympathy. In Him we confess the Sun of Righteousness who hath arisen with healing in His wings, and whose bright beams cast a heavenly radiance over this dark earth, transforming every function of human existence, every institution of public and private life, investing with fresh meaning and unsuspected beauty even ‘the trivial round, the common task,’ dignifying even the meanest, the most repulsive occupations of man or woman. Hence St. Gregory Thaumaturgus has well called the Incarnation, ‘a bridge between earth and heaven.’ And now,” the Bishop continued, after enlarging somewhat upon this theme, “there is one institution of civilised, of Christian society, which we must specially think of to-day, as we welcome back among us him to the piety of whose ancestors we owe this House of Prayer, and of whom I will only say — for in this place, sacred to the All Holy, the praises of men should be unex-

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pressed — that to many of us he, too, has been the minister of God for good. He comes to us not alone, but with her whose hand it was my privilege to join to his, in that closest of human bonds which the Babe of Bethlehem has invested with a higher and nobler significance. Marriage we may call a sacrament of the natural order, whereof the husband and the wife are the ministers. But, by the fulness of grace and truth, going forth from the Divine Infant, whose birthday we are keeping, it has been touched, and transfigured, and hallowed into a religious rite: it has become Holy Matrimony. It is a symbol of the union between Him and His elect, whose souls are the sacred shrines of His indwelling Spirit. So that, in the happy language of Jeremy Taylor, every breach of it 'desecrates a temple, and deflowers a mystery.' Such is the august import, the high ideal of marriage among Christians. And now, when, with these thoughts, we continue the solemn Eucharist which we have begun, and I approach the altar of God, even the God of our joy and gladness, to offer to the Divine Majesty, for you and for myself, the oblation of our service, and of the whole Christian family, let us make a special commemoration of the newly wedded pair whom, at this Christmastide, we are welcoming to their home. And what shall our petition for them be? Surely that they may

“ ‘ walk this world
Yoked in all exercises of noble end,
And so, through those dark gates, across the wild
That no man knows.’ ”

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And that, when the time comes to them — as come it will to all of us — to give account of their stewardship, they may hear the supreme benediction, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' and may enter into the joy of Him of whose fulness such as are worthy shall receive more abundantly beyond the veil."

CHAPTER XLI

THE house party at the Castle gradually dwindled after New Year's Day, and before the week was over, all the guests but two had departed. The Duchess would not hear of Lilian's going. Henry would be very much occupied with Lieutenancy business, with County Council business, with private business, — all of which had got into arrears during his five months' absence. Lilian could not possibly be spared, but must stay and keep her company; and it would be surely much better for Mrs. Tremenheere to spend the winter in her sunny suite of rooms at the Castle, than to go back to Wimbledon, where the house looked north. It would not have been easy to resist this hospitable pressure, in which the Duke heartily joined with his wife, even if Lilian and Mrs. Tremenheere had wished to do so. And they certainly did not wish.

So Miss Liddell was soon looked upon as a sort of member of the family, appearing, as she

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did, everywhere with the Duke and Duchess; in the hunting-field, and at county-balls and other festivities. Her time at the sea had done wonders for the girl. And her stay in the country, with such pleasant companionship as her dear Kitty's, and her dear Kitty's husband's, completed her convalescence. The glow of health returned to her cheeks; the look of langour disappeared from her eyes; and an air of pensiveness, which her face often wore, did not render her less attractive.

"She is lovelier than ever," the Duchess said to her husband.

Certainly, wherever she went, she excited unbounded admiration.

"I believe every marriageable man we have met since we have been here has proposed to you, Lilian," Mrs. Tremeneere said.

The girl, laughing and blushing, replied that several gentlemen had paid her that compliment, but that she did not think it worth while to mention such trifles to auntie. Curiously enough, however, she did think it worth while to mention them to Adolf von Kleist, to whom she wrote, every week, a sort of abstract and brief chronicle of her doings. And there was one of her suitors of whom she made more than a casual mention. Herbert Baldwyn, who, after ten years' service with his regiment, had unexpectedly come into a property adjoining the Bracy estate, upon the death, in quick succession, of his father and elder brother, was immensely fascinated by Lilian. He was a fine, manly fellow, a little over thirty, who

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had achieved distinction both in his profession and as a writer of fiction. His fortune was ample, his home stately, his reputation unblemished. The Duke, who had known him well from a boy, had a great regard for him. Always a frequent visitor at the Castle, hardly a day passed after he had met Lilian without his finding an opportunity of being there, on some pretext, good or bad. The girl liked him extremely, and was touched by his adoring devotion.

"I could not help his proposing to me," she wrote to Kleist,—she had said much the same to the Duchess and Mrs. Tremeneere,— "and I can't tell you how sorry I was to pain him by refusing him. It makes me unhappy to think of him."

Kleist gave Savile the letter to read, as he did all Lilian's letters. The two men were sitting in the library at Göttelstein, and there was silence between them for a while, as they puffed at their cigars. At last Savile said: "You don't know, Adolf, how sorry and ashamed I feel when I look back over the last fifteen years of my life."

"That is well," his cousin replied; "that is well. That goes as far towards undoing the past as is possible," he added thoughtfully: "*Quem pœnitet peccasse pœne est innocens.*"

"I don't know what to do," the other continued, after one more perusal of Lilian's letter: "I don't know what to do. Baldwyn is an excellent fellow,—a very fine fellow, indeed, in every respect an admirable match for her. She never seems to think of me. At all events, she never

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mentions me to you or, so far as I can make out, to my aunt. And yet I feel that I am spoiling her life. I would rather give up all hope of her — and it's a forlorn hope — than do that."

"It is quite the right view to take."

"Shall I write and tell her so?"

"I would n't, if I were you, Philip. She never thinks of you! I believe she is always thinking of you. Give her time."

"I wish, Adolf, it were possible for you to go and see her, and to find out how things really are."

"I had been thinking of that; but I don't like to leave you alone in this old place. It's gloomy in winter for a man whose thoughts are not very bright."

"I've plenty to do, you know. Besides, they've asked me to go to the Embassy at Berlin. I could be there for a fortnight or so. And it would be convenient for getting some information I require for making a book out of those *Nineteenth Century* articles of mine."

So it was settled. And Kleist wrote to the Duchess, then and there, offering himself for a brief visit to Bracy Castle. A telegram in reply swiftly notified the warm welcome which awaited him. The Duke was wont to say that he honoured Adolf von Kleist more than any man living, — a sentiment in which the Duchess concurred, with a private reservation in favour of her husband. Lilian's delight almost led Mrs. Tremmenheere — whose own delight, indeed, if less exuberant was

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hardly less deep—to fancy that the girl had at length substituted Adolf for her shattered idol.

“No, auntie,” said the Duchess; “the Baron is not the rose; it is only that he lives so near the rose.”

Kitty had got into the way of calling Mrs. Tremeneere “Auntie,” and asked her if she minded.

“Mind!” laughed the old lady, “it is an honour from so great a princess.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, auntie,” Kitty replied, kissing her.

So Adolf von Kleist came, and stayed a fortnight, and hunted with Lilian, and drove with Lilian, and walked with Lilian, and sang with Lilian, and went to church with Lilian, until casual observers called them “the Inseparables,” and felt quite sure that the handsome young German nobleman was the Jason who had won the fleece. They would have been undeceived if they could have heard the conversation of the pair. Though Lilian never mentioned Philip Savile’s name, she was ever leading Adolf to talk of him. Kleist knew, from the first, that the girl’s heart was unchanged. But he refrained from pleading his cousin’s cause, directly or indirectly. A sure instinct told him that to do so would probably mar it.

One day, however, Lilian drove out with Eva Chatteris, who was soon to exchange that name for Bassett, and who had come on a brief visit to the Castle, chiefly to secure her friend as bridesmaid. And the Baron took advantage of the

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opportunity to hold a grand council of war with the Duke and Duchess and Mrs. Tremenheere.

"What do *you* think, Duke?" he asked after much discussion.

"Well," the Duke replied, "I think Philip Savile's best chance will be to come over shortly, and to see Lilian, and to ask her to be his wife. I am sure his presence will have a great effect upon her. We shall be going up to Town in March. And, early in April, Kitty will give a ball. Lilian will, of course, be there. Let Savile come over to it, but let her not know that he is coming. To meet him unexpectedly, in that semi-public way, will be less awkward for the girl than a pre-arranged private tête-à-tête, and will give him a better chance. Such is my advice, as an old diplomatist."

The plan found favour with the other three, and the Duke added, —

"I don't feel sure of Savile's success, but I am hopeful; and you may tell him so, Baron, if you think he would like it, and tell him too, please, that he has my very best wishes and the Duchess's."

Kitty nodded assent.

"And mine too," said Mrs. Tremenheere, "although I have n't attempted to influence Lilian, and must not."

So Kleist returned to Göttelstein, well pleased with his embassy: well pleased, too, with Herbert Baldwyn, whom he sincerely pitied and invited to visit him, promising sport, — "real sport, you know; none of your tame potting which goes by

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that name here." And the weeks went on too swiftly for the Duke and Duchess, who regretted leaving their home more and more, as the day for their departure grew nearer.

At last it came.

"We sha'n't stay in that horrid Town longer than we can help, Hector," Kitty said, giving the dog a last caress. And then, in two hours, she was at Shropshire House, mistress, for the first time, of its splendours, with all the duties and responsibilities of a leader of London society. First came her presentation upon her marriage, and then the arrangements for her ball. Lady Helena, who had had an attack of influenza, was not well enough to come up, so the young Duchess was obliged to turn to her husband for information and advice.

"It seems a shame to trouble a man like you about such things," she said.

"To help you, Kitty dearest, is never a trouble," was the fond reply. "And these invitations must be carefully done." In fact, it was plainer sailing than Kitty had anticipated; but there were a few people about whom she was doubtful.

"That Mr. Bostock," she said, "whom people think so clever, must we ask him? He is a great deal in the swim; why, I can't think, he's an unpleasant sort of man, and he never looks quite sober. He is certainly underbred."

"So he is," the Duke replied, "although he is well-born. I had hoped better things from him. He might have been a philosopher, and has sunk

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into a *petit maitre*. He mistakes vulgarity for smartness, and inaccuracy for originality. Still, I think we must let him in."

"Lord and Lady Sempringham," Kitty went on. "She is in Egypt. Need we ask him?"

"Don't you want?" said her husband, laughing.

"Well, I wish I had n't let him kiss me."

"Don't think it a bad compliment, little lady," he rejoined banteringly, "but upon my word I should not be very much surprised if he had forgotten — or nearly forgotten — that kiss; he has kissed so many women since, you may be sure."

Kitty made a face, and rubbed her little white hand across her cheek.

"Lady Dewsbury was singing his praises the other day," she said: "'so charming, and attentive, and large-hearted!'"

"Well, so he is," the Duke laughed: "a most charming man — out of his own house; most attentive — to other men's wives; and large-hearted indeed — capable of loving half a dozen women at once. Ask him by all means."

Kitty laughed in return. "Well, if he's all that, I must ask him; he'll be such an acquisition. And Aunt Mary? I'd much rather not ask her, but I don't see how we can help it. It will be so disagreeable for Lillian."

"It ought to be much more disagreeable for Mary; and we *can't* help it. I told her that if she continued to *afficher* herself with Savile I would n't receive her. But she has n't — no thanks to her, probably."

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"Now she's got Algy Vane always with her," Kitty observed. "Poor Uncle John!"

The Duke did not think it necessary to inform his wife that Uncle John had consolations. He merely said: "Only a very strong reason should lead us to pass her over. And no such reason exists — now."

"And of course we must think of Uncle John," Kitty went on. "He has always been so very good to me. I wouldn't hurt his feelings for worlds. And we could n't ask him without her, you know. And he adores dancing; he says it is the only one of the fine arts which he understands."

"He has patronised it at great expense," the Duke rejoined drily.

But Kitty's mind was so engrossed with her forthcoming ball that she did not ask for information about that item of Mr. Silvertown's expenditure, — a matter in which she took little interest indeed.

The next day a large envelope with a ducal coronet reached 100 Grosvenor Square, and inside was a large card with "To meet their Royal Highnesses" printed on it; and peace flowed into Lady Mary's soul. She and her husband had not been included in the Christmas house party at Bracy Castle; at which she did not wonder, but he did.

"You see," she had explained to him, "that, though the Castle is a huge place, the accommodation there is not unlimited; and there are so many of the Bracy kith and kin whom Kitty

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does n't know, and it is quite natural that they should be asked instead of us, whom she knows so well; and then Mrs. Tremeneere, I hear, has the suite of rooms I always have. Henry and Kitty are simply dotty about that tiresome old woman and that pale prude of a Miss Liddell, who, I am told, has left off being a governess."

"Miss Liddell is a lovely girl," Silverton rejoined, "although not my style." And, indeed, whether Lady Mary or Mademoiselle Bergerac was to be taken as typical of Mr. Silverton's style, the statement was unquestionably correct.

But Kitty did n't feel at all sure how Lilian would take Lady Mary's invitation to the ball, and thought she would drive over to The Cedars and explain to her friend how impossible it was to pass over Uncle John and Uncle John's wife. She found both Lilian and Mrs. Tremeneere in dire distress. The old lady had that morning received a letter from her nephew, telling her that Adolf von Kleist had been struck down by a sharp attack of typhoid fever. His father's sister was with him. Nurses had been sent for from Nuremberg. A physician of great eminence had been summoned from Munich. His state was critical.

"I must go to him," Lilian moaned; "I must go, auntie, and help to take care of him. He may die, and I must see him again."

The Duchess soothed her friend, asked for the letter and read it, pointed out that everything

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was being done that could be done, and undertook that Lilian should go if graver tidings came, and that she herself would make all the arrangements for the journey.

The news cast a gloom over Shropshire House. Kitty seriously thought of putting off her ball. But soon a better account came. The fever had run its course, and there were no complications, no *sequelæ*. The sufferer was terribly weak; but he had the best of nursing, and his convalescence was judged to be only a matter of time.

"Of course I sha'n't leave him," Savile wrote to the Duchess, "till he is quite out of the wood; so I fear there is no chance of my being at your ball."

"It will be a pity, Henry," she said to her husband, "if that nice plan of yours doesn't come off."

"The great thing," he replied, "is that the poor fellow should pull through. There are n't so many like him in the world that we can afford to lose him. As for Philip Savile and Lilian — well, we must find another opportunity."

Lilian, delivered from her great anxiety about Adolf von Kleist, thought little about the awkwardness of meeting Lady Mary Silverton.

"I'm sure," she said to Kitty, "I don't care much more about passing her in a ball-room than in the street. I have nothing to blush for."

"That's so sensible of you, dear," replied Kitty, much relieved. "And you and auntie

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must come to us two days before the ball, and stay for as many days after as you can. It will be so nice having you."

And it was settled accordingly.

CHAPTER XLII

SO the day for Kitty's ball came, and brought with it a letter for Lilian, bearing a German postmark, and directed in a handwriting which she did not know. She opened it with trembling fingers and read, with difficulty, the pencilled words :

"They tell me I am not going to die; but it has been a hard fight for life. I wanted to live to see you happy, Schwesterchen. I'm too weak to hold the pencil. Be kind to Philip. A."

Glad tears welled up to the girl's eyes. He had come back from the gates of the grave; and his first thought was for her, for her happiness. How he loved her! How good he was! How unselfish! How touching were those last words, "Be kind to Philip," traced with such difficulty by the trembling hand that had written so much to her in her dire need.

"I'm glad I kissed it," she thought. How she wished she could love him. Ah, she did love him! But not in *that* way. Schwesterchen! Perhaps the love she gave *him* was a higher love, — more pure, quite ideal, with no touch of earth.

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She thought of the legend of St. Cecily, which she had read in Chaucer. "I have an Angel which that loveth me." Yes, Adolf was her good angel, always watching over her, always thinking about her.

So she went on musing, and all the time the words "Be kind to Philip" kept sounding in her ears; and she never heard when Mrs. Tremenheere knocked at her door, and came into her room.

"Lilian, my dear child, what a brown study you are in!"

"Yes, auntie; I have had a few pencilled words from Adolf which have set me thinking. He is mending; but he is terribly weak; the writing is almost illegible."

Mrs. Tremenheere, accustomed to the girl's reserve, did not ask to see the letter. And she did not show it. She felt it was too sacred for any eyes but hers.

It was ten o'clock, and Shropshire House was ablaze with lights and a very bower of flowers, when the Duchess ran into her husband's dressing-room, just as he was finishing his toilette.

"Now, Henry, never mind about your tie, but look at me. Did you ever see anything so beautiful in your life as this gown? Louise said I should be late if I stood admiring it in the glass any longer; so I have come to you to admire it instead. Don't I really look nice?"

The Duke had dismissed his man that he might be free to express his admiration. "Darling, you make the prettiest picture I ever saw. But

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I like you as well in your little blue frock, with your pink shirt, which you wore on our travels."

"Why, Henry, what *are* you saying? You, who are so fastidious about my clothes. Don't you know that this gown has given me any amount of trouble to design and carry out, and that I quite dread Désirée's bill for it? And you say you like my old blue serge as well. You can't have looked at it!"

"Ah, that's it. I could n't take away my eyes from the dearest and most bewitching little face in all the world. But, really, it is an admirable creation: it suits your girlish features and figure perfectly, while there is a suggestion of *grande dame* about it."

"Ah! there you speak like the man of taste you are. I shall get lots of compliments about my dress to-night, but none so nice as that!" and she put up her lips for him to kiss.

"Oh, I've just had a telegram from Philip Savile to say he will be here after all. But don't breathe a word to Lilian. Do you know, I'm getting a bit frightened about those Royalties who are coming? Am I to be very deferential, or am I to swagger a bit as your wife?"

"Don't do either," he laughed. "Be your own natural little self, and you will charm the Royalties and everyone. Indeed, you could not be anything else if you tried. But what are you looking at?"

She had put her little head on one side, and was surveying him critically. "I was thinking

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that you are quite the nicest-looking man I have ever seen."

"You little humbug," he replied, gently pinching her ear.

"Oh, don't! you will make my ear red. I must break you of those bad ways. But I'm not a humbug; you know that," turning fully on him her great brown eyes. "I mean it. You look far more like a king than any of the Royalties."

"You will turn my head, Kitty," he said, laughing.

"I don't care if I do; you have turned mine," and the girl threw her arms round him. "Oh, dear! what am I doing? I shall crease your shirt, and spoil your lovely blue ribbon. No; it is all right." She turned to go, but checked herself, and came and stood close to him. "Henry," she said shyly, and casting her eyes on the ground, "there is something I must tell you now. I had thought I would tell you later. But I *can't* wait."

"What is it, sweetest?" and he took her hand in his, in his kind protective way.

"You remember the last thing the Reverend Mother said to you at the convent?"

"Yes," and she saw the glad light in his eyes.

"I have thought it for some little time — but I did n't feel sure; and I did n't like to tell you, for fear you might be disappointed after all. But I've had a talk this afternoon with dear old Mrs. Tremeneere. And — and — oh, Henry, aren't you glad?" and she lifted her bright brown eyes to his.

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He stooped down and kissed them. "Glad!" he said. "I can't take you in my arms for fear of spoiling that miracle of dressmaking. Glad? But we shall have to take care of you, sweetest. I don't mean coddling; there's no need for that; but we must be reasonably prudent. That's all. You see, you have three to think of now, Kitty."

"I will do all you wish, Henry. Don't I always? I suppose I may dance to-night?"

"Oh, yes; three or four dances, — four, say."

"Make it five, and the fifth shall be for you. That fifth can't do me any harm. Don't you remember my telling you I am never afraid of coming to harm with you?"

"Remember! I don't think I have forgotten one word you have ever said to me, Kitty; and am I likely to forget *that*? Thank God for this new happiness."

"I do," she said simply. "And now I must go and look after things. Don't be long," and she tripped lightly away.

Soon she took her place at the head of the staircase, with the Duke by her side, and received her guests with charming girlish dignity and grace.

"Am I doing it right?" she whispered once to him, who whispered back, "You are quite perfect. I am so proud of my wife."

"My dear Kitty, I congratulate you; your ball is a tremendous success; and what a dream of a dress!" said Lady Mary, who, with her husband, was just then announced, as she shook hands with her niece and passed on, a radiant vision, into the ball-room.

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"I'm proud of you, Kitty," her uncle murmured.

Quickly the magnificent rooms filled with all that was loveliest and most distinguished in London society. But Philip Savile did not come. Kitty wondered why. Had he been recalled to the Baron? Had there been an accident? Perhaps he had lain down to rest a little after his long journey, and had fallen asleep. Perhaps — but her conjectures were cut short by the voice of a Serene Highness congratulating her upon the success of the evening.

"I'm an old soldier, Duchess," the Teutonic potentate was pleased to observe, "and you must excuse an old soldier's bluntness. Shropshire is quite one of the best fellows I know, every inch a gentleman. I wrote to congratulate him when I saw that he was going to be married. I should have done it much more warmly if I had known you," and his bleared eyes rested upon her with bold admiration.

Kitty blushed, and thought the Grand Duke must have been doing himself well at dinner, — which, indeed, was so; he always does. But she merely said that he was very kind.

"Not at all, not at all! Shropshire deserves his good fortune. What a lovely house this is! A perfect place for a ball. And it's a perfect ball, too! The floor might have come from the Arctic regions and the flowers from Paradise." This stock phrase of H. S. H. was new to Kitty, and she thought it pretty, as, indeed, it is. I have often wondered where he got it. "I wish

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I were ten years younger," he continued. "I should like to ask you to dance. But I'm too old for that sort of thing. We all grow old, you know, unless we die first," and he paused for a moment, as if he had discovered some new verity. "But you will never grow old, Duchess, or, if you do, you won't show it in the way that I do."

Kitty, surveying the very purple face, and very bald head, and very portly person of the speaker, devoutly hoped not, and wondered what would come next. But, happily, the moment had arrived for the Royalties to sup; and the summons was grateful to the warrior, several hours having elapsed since his dinner. The valiant soldier was also a valiant trencher-man.

So the evening wore away, and the eulogium upon Kitty which it has been our privilege to hear from illustrious lips, was ratified by general consent. Our dear Lilian's loveliness was universally acknowledged, too; and principalities and powers wondered who she was. It was half-past two, and she was waltzing with the Duke, when a hansom drove up to Shropshire House, and a tall man quickly got out and strode up the steps and into the entrance hall. He was passing through the conservatory, which, as those of my readers privileged by the *entrée* to that august dwelling are aware, is the nearest way to the music-room, when he heard his name, "Philip!" He knew the voice too well; and a sort of spasm ran through his frame. He turned, and Lady Mary beckoned him to the seat next to that on which she was sitting, half hidden by the flowers.

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"I have been dancing with Algy Vane and have sent him for my fan. Come and sit by me," and there was in her eyes that look which had made him call them lodestars in the days when they drew him at her will.

But he did not sit down. He stood before her with a pained expression on his face. "Mary," he said, "I have just arrived from Germany, and I have as yet spoken to no one; it is fitting that my first words should be to you: and those words must be the last words I wrote you, 'Forgive and forget.'"

"You have come from Germany, Philip, to say *this* to me. Ah, no!" and there was the old subtle witchery in her tone and in her glance. But the spell was broken.

"Yes," he replied, looking at her sadly and earnestly, "that is one thing that I have come from Germany for. Another is again to ask Lilian Liddell to be my wife.

"Ah, Vane," he exclaimed, as he shook hands with the young man, who came up with the fan, and who looked at him much as a small dog looks at a big one, "I have been trying to console Lady Mary for your absence; but she is inconsolable. And now I must find the Duchess, whom I have n't yet seen. I've just come off a long journey."

Savile passed into the music-room, where the dancing was, entering it by one door as the Duke was leaving it at another, with Lilian on his arm. She had said she was a little tired, and he had replied, —

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"Then you must rest a while. Come into Kitty's own den, you will be undisturbed there, and keep quiet for a bit."

"Yes, I think I will," she answered. "I've been dancing every dance; I'm in such high spirits to-night; it is a lovely ball."

"Let me look at your card," he said. "Ah, Twistleton has booked you for the next dance. Well, I will excuse you to him, and get him another partner, and I'll send you some refreshments here, and I'll come and fetch you in a quarter of an hour. You will be rested by then, and fit to renew the campaign. You mustn't overdo it, you know."

"How good you are to me, Duke!" she said. "Yes, that will be a capital plan."

He turned to go, and found himself face to face with Savile, who had followed them unperceived.

"I *am* glad to see you," the Duke said, shaking hands with him warmly. "And you have come at the right moment to take my place," pointing to the seat next Lilian, "for my duties as host call me away," and, as he left the room, he considerably closed the door, and thought he would not send Lilian the promised refreshments.

But Savile did not take the proffered seat. He stood before the girl he loved, devouring her with his eyes. It seemed as if words would not come to him. At last he said, in a trembling voice, "Lilian!"

She was looking at him with questioning trouble in her face.

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"Are you right in leaving Adolf?" she asked.

"Yes; he wished me to come here, and the doctors would not have me thwart him. Indeed, they think it as well for him that I should be away. All he wants now is quiet and nourishment. He sleeps the greater part of his time, eats as much as they dare let him, and is growing stronger every day."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed fervently.

"Yes, thank God! You don't know how much I owe him."

"Perhaps I do."

"I owe it to him," Savile went on, "that I am looking once more on the lovely face which is all the world to me. I don't think I should have had the courage to come if he had not bid me. You know what I have come to ask you, Lilian. You did n't seem surprised to see me. Did any one tell you I was coming?"

"No; but I knew you were, although I did not think I should see you here to-night."

"I wanted to see you to-night—this very night, Lilian. For it is a year ago to-day that you came to that dinner in my chambers, and it was then that I began to love you."

"I know," she said, in half a whisper.

"And you knew I was coming, though no one told you?"

"I had a presentiment—or something more. Tell me," she went on, "what were you doing at three o'clock last night?"

"I was in the train. I have travelled day and night to get here. At three o'clock last night—

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I remember it well, for I looked at my watch — I was thinking of this meeting, and of what I should say to you — and I have n't said it — and praying God, with my whole heart and soul, that your answer might be what I would give my life for. Lilian, do you love me still?"

"I was awake then," the girl continued, "and was thinking about you, Philip; and just as the clock struck three I seemed to hear the rushing noise of a train, and I knew it was bringing you to me; and then the noise ceased, and I was conscious of your voice asking me that question; and I prayed to God that the right answer might be put into my mind."

"Yes," he said in almost breathless suspense.

"And a ray of moonlight came into my room, and fell upon a little table, where dear Kitty had placed some of my favourite books. And the thought came to me that I would get up, and open one of them at hazard, and leave it open, and look at it the first thing in the morning, and find my answer in the words on which my eyes should fall. Do you think that foolish? It seemed a sort of inspiration."

"Foolish!" he replied, wrought up to the highest pitch of feverish expectation. "Oh, Lilian, how can I think anything you do foolish? But—" and he cast down his eyes, fearing to read his doom in hers.

"I can't tell you why I did it. It came upon me irresistibly. I did n't know what the book was that I opened; there was n't light enough to see. I got into my bed again, and went to sleep

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at once, feeling quite happy, for I thought I should be rightly guided. And when I woke in the morning, a ray of sunlight was shining on the book ; it was *The Princess*, and I looked on the open page and read these lines, —

“ ‘ Indeed I love : the new day comes : the light —
Dearer for night, as dearer thou for faults
Lived over : lift thine eyes : my doubts are dead.’ ”

Her voice was very sweet and tender ; and she put her hand in his.

“ Lilian, my life, my wife ! ”

They were silent for a time. Then he said : “ Lilian, I can’t thank you ; no words can. My life must be a thank-offering. It shall be. May God deny me the mercy I so sorely need, if it is not,” and his voice had a deep, serious ring in it which she had never heard before.

“ I trust you, Philip,” she replied. And then, after a moment, “ Tell Adolf that I have been kind to you. We owe this to him.”

“ Yes, to him ; I will tell him just what you bid me.”

“ Yes, those very words, please. And now,” in a lighter tone, “ let us go into the music-room, and dance the next waltz together, unless you are too tired.”

“ Tired ! ” he replied, and the old bright smile, so long absent from his eyes, came back.

“ That will be the best way of letting auntie and Kitty and the Duke and — others, know about us, and will save us tiresome questions.”

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"You are quite happy, Lilian dearest?" he asked as they walked to the music-room.

"Quite, Philip! Doubts and darkness have fled away; light and peace have come to me."

So they were soon in the music-room, dancing, and their happy faces told Kitty, who at once espied them, that all was well. And she hastened to tell her husband, who was talking to Mrs. Tremenhoe.

"Thank God," said the Duke.

"Yes, thank God," echoed a voice close to them. It was Dr. Williamson's.

"Dear Dr. Williamson, I am delighted," the young Duchess said in her frank, bright way; "I had given up all hope of seeing you — though you promised to come."

"I've had a country journey, and could n't get back by the train I had intended. So I ordered a special train. And there was a delay in getting one. But — it is always best to speak the truth — there was another reason besides my wish to keep my word to you, Duchess, which made me anxious to be at your ball to-night. I had a telegram this morning from Savile, telling me I should find him here. I caught sight of him just now, waltzing with Lilian, and I heard — a doctor's ears are quick, and your voice, Duchess, is very clear — your words to the Duke."

And then Savile and Lilian came up, and, in accordance with that young lady's sagacious prevision, escaped tiresome questionings, and received congratulations which were chiefly monosyllabic, eked out by warm pressure of the hand.

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But Williamson said in a low voice to Savile, "Do you know it's exactly a year to-day that I preached you that sermon, Philip?"

And he replied,—

"Yes, I know, George; and you see it has borne fruit. Just twelve months to-day! What a year of life!"

And then Savile explained to the Duchess his late arrival: the weather in the Channel was so bad that the boat had to put back twice. And the Duke, struck by his lean and hungerly appearance, observed,—

"You have n't dined?"

To which he responded, with a laugh, "Well, hardly: I am certainly ready to sup."

"So am I, Duke," said Williamson; "I am in the like evil case, I missed my dinner."

"And now I come to think of it, I really have had no proper supper," the Duchess testified.

"Nor I," chimed in her husband. "Somehow one does n't sup when entertaining Royalties at one's own ball."

"Now, Lilian, you're hungry too?" said the Duchess. "Confess; happiness always makes one hungry."

"Well," the girl laughed, "I confess; I am very happy and very hungry. You will be astonished at my appetite," she added, turning to Dr. Williamson. "But, no, you won't; I owe you that,—and how much more!" she added in an undertone.

"Auntie, I know, is hungry," the Duchess asserted; "I can see it in her face."

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And Mrs. Tremeneere confessed that her great joy had given her rather a sinking, and that some nourishment would be acceptable.

"That's capital," the Duke summed up; "we are a hungry party. A table shall be spread for us in the library — it will be cool and fresh there — as soon as everyone has gone."

"That won't be long," said Kitty, "now they have begun. Is n't it funny? They all seem to go at once. Everyone is afraid to be the last."

So in less than half an hour they were seated in the library at a round table laden with all manner of good things.

"Henry," Kitty had said, "do tell the servants that we will wait on ourselves, and that they may go away. We have so much to talk about, and we can't say it before them — or have any fun."

"A capital idea, Kitty," he replied.

And so the servants thought it, and found in it another proof of his Grace's consideration for them, as the faithful Louise duly reported to her mistress.

"That's how your Grace obtains credit under false pretences," she laughed to her husband.

"O noctes cœnæque Deum!" They are not common. But I suppose we all look back on some of them, and this was one, — a night and a supper much to be remembered.

Kitty was in high spirits and freely gave vent to them. First she teased Lilian.

"Now we are by ourselves," she said, "do tell us all about it, Lilian."

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"Oh, it was very simple," the girl replied, with flaming cheeks. "Philip asked me to marry him, and I said yes."

"It wasn't so simple as all that, I know; but I'll spare your blushes, dear. And when is it to be?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Lilian replied, laughing.

"Henry and I don't approve of long engagements," the young Duchess rejoined; "we were engaged for four weeks; and it was much too long, was n't it, Henry?"

"Much," the Duke laughed.

"Now, one week would suit you and Philip down to the ground, would n't it?"

"It would suit me admirably," said Savile, with a smile, not quite sure, however, how Lilian would like the talk. But the Duke's voice was heard in graver tones, —

"It really is n't premature to discuss the question."

"Order, order! Chair, chair!" cried Kitty. "The Duke of Shropshire is about to make a few neat and appropriate remarks upon this interesting topic."

"Oh, Kitty, you madcap!" Lilian laughed.

"Madcap, did you say?" and the girl rose and struck an attitude with a mock dignity which was irresistibly comic.

"Kitty, Kitty!" exclaimed the Duke, "what high spirits you're in; but don't make us die of laughing, please." Then, addressing Lilian, "We are all so happy about you and Savile, that we

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must relieve our feelings by talking a little nonsense."

"Oh," said Kitty, "if my profound observations are to be called nonsense, I shall shut up," and she pretended to look offended, but with such ill success that everyone laughed loudly again, and she loudest of all.

"Your least remark is worth the experience of the wise, Kitty."

"What a nice compliment; and it is all the nicer because I know where it comes from. And now I am quite appeased. And will your Grace please deliver the neat and appropriate remarks with which you were about to favour the meeting?"

"I think I'd better," said the Duke, "because the matter presses."

"I told you so, Lilian," the Duchess interposed.

"The fact is, Savile, you ought to get back into Parliament as soon as possible; don't you think so?"

"Indeed I do, Duke; I very much desire it."

"And you, Lilian?" the Duke added.

"You don't know how I wish it!"

"Well, I heard only this evening — I've Bideford's letter in my pocket now — that Gerard has got the Governorship of the Windward Islands. That will vacate the seat for the Mud-dleton Division. You ought to get it, Savile. Of course, as a peer, I don't interfere in Parliamentary elections. But I happen to have property in the Division; and I have the good fortune to be on the best of terms with my tenants, and I

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believe with the people generally. So that any candidate known to be a friend of mine would probably start with something in his favour."

"It is a chance, Savile," said Williamson. "Duke, I always call you an earthly Providence."

"I'm afraid a seat in Parliament means, in these days, spending a great deal of money," sighed Mrs. Tremenheere.

"I remember," said Kitty, "hearing Uncle John say that his cost him between £5,000 and £6,000 a year."

"Of course," the Duke remarked, "membership of Parliament is, as a rule, more costly in this age of purity of election than it used to be, indirect bribery being much more expensive than direct. But the seat for the Muddleton Division is a cheap one. It ought not to cost more than £300 or £400 a year. I'm sure it didn't cost Gerard more, if so much. He has very little money to spare. The fact is, that I do a great deal myself there for such charities and other depletory institutions as, I expect, absorb most of Silverton's largesses in the Frothingham Division."

"How can I—we—thank you, Duke?" said Savile. "May I regard my candidature as settled?"

"I think you may. There will be no difficulty. No one knows as yet about Gerard's appointment. You will be the first in the field. I'll go down to the Carlton to-morrow, and arrange it. They are sure to accept my candidate."

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"But what has this to do with Lilian's marriage?" asked Kitty.

"A great deal," the Duke answered. "The Governorship of the Windward Islands has been vacant for some time; and the islanders are as sheep having no shepherd. So Gerard will go out at once."

"To shear them?" laughed Williamson.

"Well, he wants the salary badly," the Duke allowed.

"And so," said Kitty, "Lilian should be married forthwith — before the election comes off?"

"Exactly," the Duke replied. "I don't think there's much doubt about Savile's success, anyhow. But with Lilian as his bride to canvass for him, it would be quite certain. I'm sure the freest and most independent of electors could n't resist her."

"No more they could," assented Kitty. "It is a delightful idea! And what a capital way of spending a honeymoon! It is not hackneyed. Henry, you *are* clever! But I've a little scheme of my own to cap yours."

"Which I'm sure will be very clever too, Kitty. What is it?"

"Only that the wedding should be here. It would be such fun: better than a ball, even. And it would save auntie so much trouble. And they might go to the Castle for their honeymoon."

"Yes," said her husband, "that is really a clever idea. And, Lilian, I must have the honour of giving you away. You must re-

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ceive her from my hands, Savile. The Castle is just in the centre of the Muddleton Division, and will be the very place for their honeymoon. Well, Lilian, well, Savile, what do you say?"

"Any amendment to his Grace's motion, which I second?" cried Kitty.

"Really," said Savile — and his voice trembled, — "I can only think of the old proverb: 'it never rains but it pours.' I can't express, Duke, what I feel about your kindness, and the Duchess's. How is it possible? There are limits to the power of language."

"And you, Lilian?" asked Kitty.

"I feel quite as Philip does. Indeed, I can't speak. Your goodness, and the Duke's, makes me inclined to cry."

"No, dear, don't 'ee, although you do cry so becomingly! So it is all settled except the wedding-day, which you and auntie and I will discuss to-morrow."

"It's to-morrow already," the Duke observed.

"That's a bull," said Kitty. "Oh, but there is one thing more. We must have *our* Bishop to marry you! He marries people so very nicely, doesn't he, Henry?"

"Beautifully," laughed the Duke, "at least he did me."

"You know, instead of that frowsy old rigmarole at the end of the service, 'All you that are married, or intend to take the holy estate of matrimony upon you,' he gives a charming little extempore address — he always preaches extempore. I should have cried if I hadn't been

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so happy. My six bridesmaids did. They were fountains. I believe, however, it was because they were so sorry that I was being married to Henry and not they."

"What, all six of them?" laughed the Duke.

"I'm sure," said Williamson, "that the whole half dozen together could n't be equal in charm to the Duchess."

"A compliment from *you*, Dr. Williamson! How lovely! After that, I can't help believing that I am rather nice."

"Really," said the Duke, "we must all go to bed; it will be broad daylight soon. But let us drink a toast before we go."

"Please charge your glasses, ladies and gentlemen," said Kitty. "And silence for the chair. The Duke of Shropshire will propose a toast."

"It is a prophetic toast," the Duke observed; "but one *may* prophesy when one is sure. I give you, Sir Philip Savile, M.P., and Lady Savile."

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EPILOGUE

JUST three years afterwards, Lady Savile, clad in deep black, was driving in the Park on a bright April morning. Beside her was Lilian, the elder of her two children,—a baby reflection of her own loveliness; and opposite, in the arms of his nurse, Philip, whose infant lineaments partly recalled his mother's features, and partly his father's. Suddenly she told the coachman to stop, and alighted from her victoria. She had caught sight of Kitty, who was on foot, accompanied by the faithful Hector.

"Why, Hector," she said, after greeting her friend, as they sat down, "have you come to Town in your old age?"

"They wrote to me from the Castle," Kitty explained, "that he seemed to be unhappy and pining, and I knew it was because he missed the children, who are his constant companions. He has never taken on like that because of Henry or me being away. So we had him brought up; and now he is all right and quite happy; aren't you, Hector? He has been running with the carriage, which I have left at the corner, yonder."

"I believe he has transferred his affections from you to those two sturdy boys of yours," laughed Lilian. "It is difficult to believe you are their mother! I declare you look younger than ever!"

"I might return the compliment. And that

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'mourning is so very becoming to you. Poor Dr. Williamson! Fancy his going abroad like that — to die. Only his old man-servant with him! It seems very sad."

"He always used to say," Lilian replied, "that he would rather die alone; that he wished to collect himself, and to look at eternity, quietly and undisturbed, before he joined it. I remember well," she added, "his talking about these things the last evening he spent with us — it was at Dorrington, the day before he left England."

"What a strong and brave man he was!" said Kitty, "and how good!"

"Yes," replied Lilian; and they both mused a little in their different ways. Then Lilian said, "How well your boys are looking, I saw them yesterday!"

"They are a handful: they are so high-spirited. Henry's old nurse tells me that he was just the same. Bracy grows every day more like his father; and so does George too."

"Yes, and they are as like as two peas, except that Bracy, of course, looks older."

"I wish George had been a girl," Kitty sighed.

"You've plenty of time before you," the other laughed.

"Uncle John predicts that I shall have twelve children. I do hope there will be some girls among them. Fancy a dozen little rebels like those! What a sweet little thing Lilian is!"

"She's a good little thing, which is well, for Philip and Adolf do their best to spoil her. Indeed, Adolf simply adores her, and she has

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begun to tyrannise over him already. It is wonderful to see them together."

"She will be the Baroness von Kleist," laughed Kitty.

"I could wish the child no greater happiness," Lilian replied simply. "But she is only two. Rather early to discuss her marriage, is n't it?"

"I don't know," said Kitty, meditatively. "I'd bet a penny that I am right. But how does Philip like himself as an Under Secretary of State?"

"Very much. But he is terribly hard worked. Lord Bideford is charming. But he was always indolent; and now he is infirm too. He turns over everything to Philip that he can. Then Philip's private secretaries are very inefficient. I do a great deal of work for him. I was so busy yesterday afternoon that I could n't get down to the House of Lords to hear the Duke's speech on the Old Age Pensions Bill."

"You lost a great deal. It was a fine speech — though I say so as should n't. It woke up those old gentlemen above a bit. Some of them seemed as if they did n't know whether they were standing on their heads or their heels. Have you read it?"

"No, I was hard at work for Philip till ten, putting together some notes for a speech which he has to make this afternoon. Then I had to order dinner. I have n't had a minute."

"*The Times* is in my carriage. Come and drive with me for a little on the other side of the Park. I should like you to see the peroration of Henry's speech. It was very effective."

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"So Philip told me. He contrived to look in and hear the speech."

"I'm afraid it's a melancholy birthday for him, and for you too, dearest Lilian," the Duchess said, as they walked towards her carriage.

"Yes; we seem to miss dear George Williamson every moment. You don't know what he was to me when I was in trouble. But to Philip, he was even more. It's just three months ago that he died. I'm glad you and the Duke are coming to dine with us to-night. It's no party, of course, only auntie and Adolf. To-morrow they are taking the children down to Dorrington, where auntie will make her home now. I'm so glad we've persuaded her to give up The Cedars."

"Now, Lilian," Kitty said, when they were in the carriage, "read out to me the last few paragraphs of Henry's speech: you read so beautifully. Let me see. Begin here—'So much, my Lords.'"

"So much, my Lords, I would venture to say in recommending to you this measure. Your Lordships have been told that the Bill is ill-drawn; that some of its provisions are unworkable; that others are inequitable. I am not responsible for the Bill, and I am not concerned to deny that those criticisms may be, to a certain extent, well founded. But of one thing I am sure, the principle of the Bill is true. It is rooted in those dictates of Eternal Righteousness which are 'the moral laws of nature and of nations.' And it is the principle which I would ask your Lordships to affirm, by reading the Bill a second

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time. That principle is this: that labour is not mere merchandise; that it is a social function; that the labourer has rights other than those derived from his contract with his employer,—rights arising out of the organic nature of civil society; that he has rights against the community which he serves; and that one of those rights is to an honourable existence, in decent comfort, when the evening of his day of monotonous toil is come, and he can no longer go forth to his work and to his labour. That, my Lords, is the principle of this Bill. And I wish to express my belief, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, that it is a true principle. I am old enough to have seen ‘the peculiar institution,’ as it was called, of the United States of America: negro slavery. It fell, and great was the fall of it. And why? Because the conscience of mankind was shocked by it, and would no longer condone it. To buy a man out and out in the slave market, is no doubt a horrible proceeding. But is it much better to buy, bit by bit, the labour whereby he lives, at a competition wage,—a price which is not a *justum pretium*,—and then, when no more labour can be got out of him, to wash your hands of him? I have based my argument on the ground of justice. But this measure of justice is also sovereignly expedient. Surely these are not times in which, to use Burke’s phrase, those who hold large portions of wealth without any apparent merit of their own—and I am one of them—can afford to be indifferent to questions of this kind. Self-preser-

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vation, if no higher motive, bids us concern ourselves with them. But I will not dwell on that. I prefer to appeal to a nobler feeling, to a higher Utilitarianism. And I say that the best interests of our country bid us survey this matter with open eyes which desire the truth. A civilisation is not complete without directing classes — I do not use the invidious and misleading word, aristocracy. Large independent lives, amply developed, enfranchised from petty cares, lives devoted to the immaterial, the ideal interests of a nation, are essential to that complete and noble existence at which a nation, like the individual, should aim. It has been said, 'War to country houses, peace to cottages.' I think it would be more correct to say, 'Peace both to cottages and to country houses,' for both are necessary to a perfect civilisation. But the condition of peace is justice. A state of things where all men should have an equal share of physical comfort, seems to me, my Lords, a Utopia, and a very squalid Utopia; just as a state of things where all men should have an equal share of political power, seems to me a Utopia, and a very stupid Utopia. Inequality, not equality, is the nature of things.

“ ‘ Order is Heaven's first law : and this confess't
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest.’ ”

“ No, not equality, but justice is the true principle; and justice means a degree of inequality. But too great inequalities, too violent contrasts in the distribution of wealth are unjust; they are contrary to the true law of the social organism;

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they signify abnormal development in one part, anæmic shrinking in another. Yes; such inequalities are unjust. And who can deny that they exist among us? Who can doubt that the appalling chasm between the extreme wealth of few, and the extreme poverty of many, is a huge social danger? Who can doubt that a remedy must be found for 'the shame of mixed luxury and misery which is spread over our native land'? My Lord, I will not dwell further on this topic. It would take me too far. And I have already trespassed unduly upon your Lordships' time. I would merely submit to your Lordships, in conclusion, that the true remedy for the economic evils which afflict us is not to replace what is called — and often with too good reason — the tyranny of capitalism, by the equally real and more noxious tyranny of Socialism, but to make capital a common good. And it is because I regard this bill as a step in that direction, that I earnestly support its second reading."

"Yes," said Lilian, thoughtfully, "I'm glad the Duke said that. It is very fine and very true. This speech will ring throughout the country — and beyond — though nothing comes of it immediately. The Duke can see something more than majorities which he despises, and office which does n't attract him. And now, Kitty, I must be going back."

"I'll walk with you to your victoria," said the Duchess.

On their way they passed a child with its nurse.

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"That is Aunt Mary's little girl," said Kitty, "born on the same day as Bracy." And they stopped to look at the baby.

"She is wonderfully like Uncle John," the Duchess remarked, "but a pretty likeness of him."

"Yes," laughed Lilian, "she is like Mr. Silverton, and she is pretty, which Mr. Silverton certainly is not; but he has a very powerful face. I wonder what he would make of the Duke's speech. He poses as an advanced Radical, you know."

"Do you think Aunt Mary at all gone off?" asked Kitty, not heeding the last remark.

"I think she is not less beautiful; but she looks harder, more insolent, and, if you see her face in repose, very unhappy."

The Duchess glanced curiously at her friend, and said, after a little pause, "Yes, I think Aunt Mary is unhappy,—very unhappy. Nothing seems to interest her, not even that dear little baby. She does n't seem to care about it a bit; she seems as if she did n't want it. And I am sure Uncle John, who is now very attentive to her, bores her to extinction—though she does not let him see it. Everything seems to pall upon her, even the admiration of her men! I heard her say, the other day, to Algy Vane,—fancy her saying it before me,—'Do go away; you get on my nerves; you don't know how the sight of you irritates me.'"

"It was sure to be so," said Lilian. "Forbidden fruit has seemed to her the only fruit worth

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having; and now — she does n't care for that. Poor woman! I'm sorry for her. Ah, here is my victoria," and Lilian drove away with her children.

Two hours later Kitty was seated at luncheon with her husband. They were talking about Sir Philip Savile.

"He is doing very well," said the Duke, "very well indeed. He has a great deal of knowledge, is hard-working and accurate, and speaks clearly and persuasively. Then the charm of his appearance and manner renders him a general favourite in the House. He is the most popular man in the Administration. He ought to go far."

"Especially with Lilian to help him," added the Duchess. "Why, here's a letter from her," as a footman entered with one on a salver. "I hope there is nothing amiss."

"Won't you open it?" said the Duke.

Kitty read it, and another enclosed in it, with a grave face.

"Won't you read it out, dearest," her husband said, "or is it something private, between you two?"

"No," she replied; "it is meant for you as well as for me. But I don't think I *can* read it; it is too pathetic," and she passed the two letters over to her husband.

This is what he read :

Wednesday.

DEAREST KITTY, — When I got home I found the letter which I send to you. You may imagine how it affected Philip and me. It was sent by Messrs. Tit-

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comb and Parker, dear George Williamson's solicitors. They wrote to say that he wished it to reach Philip to-day, and instructed them accordingly, and that his bequest to me amounts to about £90,000. Ah! if I could only thank him, and tell him how constantly we think of him, and how we cherish his memory. Perhaps some day I shall. Perhaps he knows even now. You and the Duke will enter into our thoughts. You will see that the last words he ever wrote were for you.

Your loving

LILIAN.

February 9.

MY DEAR PHILIP,—When we parted, you were hopeful that I should soon come back better, and that I should dine with you on your birthday. I did not gain-say you, but I knew I should never come back. The end is very near now. It is a question of days, perhaps of hours, when I go hence, and be no more seen. I am ready to depart. My life since *she* was taken away has been a maimed one. Except for leaving you and Lilian, and a few other friends, I have little to regret in quitting the world. So far as this phenomenal existence is concerned, what does it matter whether the curtain falls a few years, or a few score of years, sooner or later? When a man is so near the close of time, I suppose he begins to see things in the light of eternity.

There is an old Jesuit priest here, Father Skinner, who, like me, is waiting for death. He came to consult me a few times, when he was at Wimbledon, some years ago, and was quite unnecessarily grateful because I would not take a fee from him, but begged him to give the money to his poor. We are a great deal together. Every morning, when we meet, we look at one another with a sort of surprise: "You here still?" His is a wonderfully sweet and simple nature. I think

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St. John the Evangelist must have been much that sort of man. We talk a great deal about the things beyond sensible experience, — he is a profound metaphysician and deeply read in the mystics. He sometimes breaks off from a discussion with a smile and the remark, “Ah! I shall know more about it soon!” It is curious how familiar the next world seems to him. I think he will die like Saint Charles Borromeo, with *En venio!* on his lips. Religious controversy never comes into our conversation. But he said to me the other day, in his gentle way: “I think if you would read over the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, you would find light on many subjects.” I read them yesterday. They are very beautiful. But I have not found the light he meant. I must do without it. Thank God, I can bow the head and worship, and trust the Master whose will I am certain — whatever I may doubt — is good, and acceptable, and perfect.

And now, Philip, good-bye. I can't be with you on your birthday; but I send, from beyond the veil, as it were, this greeting to you and Lilian. You both know my mind about you, and how I rejoice in the happiness of you both. God bless you and your children. Lilian will find that I have thought of her in disposing of my worldly goods. She will accept the gift as a sort of dowry for my old friend's wife. It is to be settled on her, and to be disposed of as she likes, after her.

Yours ever,

GEORGE WILLIAMSON.

Give my last greetings to the Duke and Duchess. You know what an affectionate regard I have for them both.

The Duke was silent for a great while after reading these letters. And his wife, on whose

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childish face was an unwonted seriousness, spoke no word. She merely came to his side and put her hand in his. Then he said: "George Williamson died a few hours after writing that, Kitty. The last words his hand traced were for you and me. It is much for us to have been honoured with that man's affectionate regard."

THE END.

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